CORONET

how to CHEAT at housekeeping

Hazel Evans

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HOW TO CHEAT AT HOUSEKEEPING

Hazel Evans combines a jet-setting life as Travel Editor of *Cosmopolitan*, Features Editor of *Family Circle* Magazine plus two gardening columns with running *two* homes, a cottage in Arundel, Sussex and a houseboat on the Thames at Chelsea. She is also a primitive painter, with 30 pictures sold so far and one exhibited at the Mall Galleries in London, and has a business making and marketing medieval witches brews. Add to this a son and daughter and a lively social life with a great deal of home entertaining to do, and you can see why she has become an expert on how to cheat at housekeeping.

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How To Cheat At Housekeeping

Hazel Evans

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For Al, who came to dinner . . .

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HOW TO KEEP YOUR COOL

At the age of eighty, my mother still remembers with horror her visits as a child to the terrible Auntie Nellie in Southfields. Before they were allowed into the house, the entire family had to take off their coats and shoes and put them into paper bags (which were snatched up and shoved into cupboards). The floor of the hall was entirely covered with layers of newspaper to protect the polish on the floor underneath. And in the bedrooms the lino was so slippery that the moment my mother

trod on a mat, she would slide straight under a bed. Even the handle of the loo had layers of brown paper wrapped round it to protect it from finger marks.

Auntie Nellie would have been in her element, today, in a wipe-clean plastic age, for Auntie Nellie, as you will have gathered, was house-proud. And I swear that it is a direct reaction to her that, a couple of generations later, I am proud to say I have devoted a good deal of my life trying to work out ways of avoiding doing housework. As a result I've always been a passionate collector of ideas, any ideas, which will cut down, better still, cut out the chores, and I'm about to pass them on to you. After all, who wants to spend hours polishing a floor when they could be having fun with the children, or out on the town? Who wants to toil over a heap of ironing when there's a great big world out there, waiting for us? It's all too easy to get ground down into a kind of overkill on running the house. Rather like nuns doing penance, we feel that housework ought to be a long-drawn-out unpleasant affair. The trouble is, no one thanks you for it, in the end. No one is going to inscribe She Was Tidy on our gravestones. A salutary story in my life was a friend of mine who started her married life with a flourish—by making her husband go down the garden to the potting shed if he wanted to smoke. She boasted that her house was so neat and tidy and well organised that if her husband had to pack enough clothes for a six-month trip in five minutes, he would be able to lay his hands on all his things, neatly tucked away in drawers, in just that amount of time. One day he did precisely that—and went off to live with another (untidier) woman.

We're not sluts, as such, we tell ourselves. We don't want to live in filth, and eat instant warm-up TV dinners. But we *do* want to have a little time left over for living and loving, and for the blissful chance to sit, just once in a while, doing absolutely nothing. But however much we may expect the unexpected it's impossible to legislate for everything. My life, for instance, leapfrogs from one catastrophe to another. As I write this I've someone coming to dinner in a quarter of an hour and nothing is ready, my hair is still in Carmen rollers; the split-second

timing of my day was ruined by one garrulous phone-call—from a man.

The horror-comic situation that we all dread is the moment when the house is a complete shambles, the living room littered with toys and old cigarette butts, the beds unmade, the washing up standing in a crazy pile on the draining board. It's nearly lunch time—when you see *them* coming up the garden path, shouting "Coo-ee!"

I've asked around, and here's my own personal cheat's guide, household hints culled from a large number of ladies, some famous, who prefer, for obvious reasons, not to give their names, on HOW TO COPE.

Stage One. They haven't yet reached the door:

Here are some emergency tactics.

Jump into your nightdress, whiten your face with talc, open the door a crack and say: "The doctor doesn't *think* it's infectious . . . "

Or slam on a coat, grab your bag, meet them firmly on the doorstep, say you've a dental appointment.

Or take off all your clothes, wrap a towel around you and say you're having a bath. (This one doesn't always work, sometimes they say they'll wait.)

Or if it's a girlfriend you know well but don't like, tell her your lover is waiting upstairs—embarrass her. (Explain later to your husband, in case she tells him.)

Stage Two. They're obviously going to beat their way into the hall:

Fling all your cleaning things down right in the way by the door; vacuum cleaner, brushes, dusters, the lot. Say you're in the middle of turning the house upside down.

Or say you had burglars the night before and the police have told you to touch nothing until they arrive.

Or dash to the airing cupboard, grab every sheet you can find, fling them over all the furniture and say you've got the decorators in.

Or if the carpet in the living room is the worst hit—covered with crumbs—up-end a jigsaw puzzle all over it and bribe your child to pretend he's just dropped it.

Stage Three. They ring and say they'll be round in ten minutes:
Lock as many doors as you can so they can't peek in at the

Grab a tin of furniture polish and dab some *under* the tops of tables and chairs—it gives a just-cleaned smell about the room, which deceives the senses which are trained to believe that polish=cleanliness.

Chuck some disinfectant down the kitchen sink and do the same in the bathroom—it works in the same way as the polish does, subliminally. If the bath has a ring round it, drape it with neatly folded bath-towels.

Cover the beds over, never mind what happens underneath, or tear everything off them, and hang it out of the window, continental style.

Stage Four. You've a little more time:

There are two things that guests always want to use—the bathroom and the phone, so keep the areas around them immaculate, and let the rest of the house go hang. Line up the telephone directories in a meticulous pile, put an ash-tray alongside, clean the bath and wash-basin if you've time, remove last Sunday's *News of the World* from the floor of the loo.

No time to straighten up properly? Have one corner of the living room, the one opposite the door, looking a picture. Arrange a huge bunch of flowers there, torn out of the garden; it will take the visitors' eyes away from the chaos that surrounds it all.

If there's time to polish the floor, gather the children together—put large dollops of polish down, put old socks over their shoes and force them to play slides on it.

People always follow you into the kitchen, so grab unwashed dishes, and sling them, temporarily inside one of the kitchen units. Fling one, or several clean tea-cloths over the rubbish on the work-top and pretend it is covering a batch of freshly-baked cakes.

Get the message? (For those of you who are worrying on my account, the Carmen rollers are now out of my hair, I have started the dinner, poured myself a large drink—and my guest is half an hour late. Why did we worry?)

How to be the hostess with the leastest

Anyone can be a fabulous hostess, it just takes time and trouble, but giving the *illusion* that you are a great cook, a splendid wife and mother, so that your friends gnash their teeth in envy, takes sheer cunning . . . Here are some ideas.

Buy ready-cooked chicken and do amazing things with it: marinate it overnight in spices, cover it with curry sauce and serve it almost instantly or serve it cold with tropical salad, scatter small white grapes over it first.

Haunt bring-and-buy sales and church fêtes for home-made jams and jellies and pickles that someone else has laboured over, take them back to your kitchen, re-label them in your own handwriting and range them prominently on a shelf.

Do the same thing with pottery. Look out for slightly misshapen ash-trays at Women's Institute fêtes and smile enigmatically if someone asks you if you have really thrown it yourself.

Buy frozen bread dough from freezer centres and bake it, scattering poppy seeds on the top for authenticity. All you have to do is put the stuff in a tin, let it thaw out and double in size, then cook it.

Be seen, in front of your neighbours, darning a pair of socks for your husband. Let your husband see this phenomenon too; strong men have been known to go weak at the knees at this unusual domestic sight.

Peer into other people's carts at the supermarket for gastronomic ideas if your own have run out—it sometimes jogs your memory that there is such a thing as tuna fish.

Only entertain at night, preferably in the winter. Not only does the house look more romantic (it probably needs decorating) but it looks less dusty too, and they can't see the fraymarks on the cushions. Never entertain at lunch time if you can help it—shafts of sunlight through the window just highlight the dust.

Do what the mother of a friend of mine does. She is famed throughout Sussex, and has been for years, for her fabulous coffee. In fact she serves Nescafé, but she puts just one coffee

bean on the hot-plate to burn while she's out, boiling the kettle . . .

Or try the home-made bread kick, used by a famous writer. Damp down a hunk of stale bread (haven't we all got some?) and sling it into a hot oven while you're serving your guests pre-dinner drinks, to give a freshly-baked smell about the kitchen.

Now, finally, here are two tips to get you going if you've been meaning to decorate for ages, but just haven't got around to it.

Invite a clutch of friends round for next week, tell them you've re-wallpapered the living room, then do it.

Or do what a friend of mind did to force herself to start work. Invite some friends round for a pre-decorating party and, as they arrive, hand them pencils and tell them to write messages for posterity on the wall—the messages were so rude that she was shamed, at the crack of dawn to go out and buy a pot of paint to cover them up.

I hope you'll excuse me now, my dinner guest has arrived . . . stay with me, join the cheats, and learn a few tips from this book . . .

WHO HATES HOUSEWORK? WE DO!

I've always felt that the daily routine of housework must come very near to everyone's idea of hell. It's the sheer *repetitiveness* of it all that gets you down, over the years, the daily re-cycling of the dishes, the clearing up. So we're agreed that the best thing to do with the daily chores is to get them over—fast. The trouble is, though, they do tend to spread to fill a vacuum in your life if you're not careful. It's amazing just how much time you can take clearing the breakfast table, for instance, when you take into account the minutes spent idly reading the back

of the cornflakes packet as you put it away, day-dreaming to the radio as you screw the top back on the marmalade. You go upstairs to make the bed and see something interesting in a magazine on the bedside table, and the whole process starts over again—procrastination. So school yourself to get those dull household jobs over and done with quickly—try the carrot method, aiming to be done by a particular time for some particular purpose, watching a programme on TV, for instance, or, better still, going out of the house altogether. Race yourself, speed yourself up as you whip around the house—use a kitchen timer. Decide how long it ought to take you to clear up and vacuum a room, for instance, set the timer for that number of minutes, then try to get it done before the timer pings. This method works wonders for those of us who are sluggish workers (count me in) and speeds up your work rate for the rest of the day. It's slimming too, because housework that is done fast uses up extra calories.

Straightening up, putting away

To help cut down on the daily routine, organise the house to tidy itself as much as you can. In the dining room, for instance, when you're having scratch meals like breakfast or supper, stand items like sauce bottles, cornflakes, sugar and so on, on a small tray on the table, and encourage the family to put these items back in place on the tray as they go—even, hopefully, stack their cup, saucer and plate on it as well. Then you've got a ready-loaded tray to take out of the room which saves a lot of time. Lay up the breakfast, incidentally, overnight if you can, do it gradually, putting something out each time you pass the table; it saves precious minutes in the morning.

Invest in duvets on the beds if you haven't already got them. They not only look tidier, but they cut down bedmaking to the absolute minimum, and even tiny children can make their own beds this way. But a duvet is not an item to save money on—a cheapjack one will go into solid lumps in no time at all and won't keep you warm enough, so stick to pure down or Terylene.

Two other ideas help to keep the place straight, naturally; waste bins in every room, for one thing. You can make them

out of an old biscuit tin or a box covered with paper to match the walls if you don't want them to be too conspicuous. Then you can get the family to do some of the work for you—encourage them to get into the habit of throwing sweet wrappers etc. straight into the bin, instead of on to the floor or down the side of a chair. The other vital item is a roll of kitchen towelling or, failing that, loo paper, on hand for quick mop-ups. In the bathroom it will swiftly wipe up shaving cream/toothpaste marks off the basin, clear up a scum ring round the bath. In the dining room it will cope with spills, ditto in the children's bedrooms.

My daily dozen

Start the day with a superficial whip-round the house, first thing in the morning. Then if some disaster strikes, if you get caught napping, or if someone calls, at least the whole place looks reasonable. Never, ever tackle one room in detail, leaving the rest in chaos—it's fatal. Here's my daily dozen of quick clear-ups:

1. Straighten downstairs first, pull back the curtains.
2. Open the windows to let out stale smells, smoke.
3. Plump up cushions, straighten chairs.
4. Stack newspapers and magazines into piles, don't sort at this stage.
5. Empty ash-trays, if you have smokers around, give them a quick wipe round with a damp cloth.
6. Stack the dishes in the sink, fill with hot water and detergent.
7. Heap items that need to go up to the first floor at the bottom of the stairs, throw soft unbreakable things—stuffed toys, for instance—straight up on to the landing.
8. Take two clean empty plastic buckets, fill up with the items to go to the top floor and take them upstairs. Distribute contents in their put-away places.
9. Fling back the bedclothes to let the beds air.
10. Go into each room with your (now empty) buckets over each arm, fill one with rubbish to be thrown away, the

other with small items like discarded cups etc. which have to go downstairs.

11. Throw large unbreakable items, like dirty clothes for sorting, down the stairs to be dealt with later in the hall. (This is the quickest method I know, the only snag is you can find yourself greeting unexpected callers amid a sea of household debris!)
12. Wipe round the bath, wash-basin etc. with a paper towel, straighten up face-flannels, towels etc.

The house is now superficially straight. Next comes the washing up which has, hopefully, been soaking in the sink.

Washing up the lazy way

The best cheat for most people on the washing-up front is to employ a dishwasher to do the job for you. I think it's an item well worth saving for, but it's not everyone's cup of tea because it doesn't really save time—minutes spent stacking the dishes correctly inside, then taking them out again and putting them away take up roughly the same time that you would spend in doing the job by hand. Another thing against a machine is that I, at least, have never found one yet that will cope adequately with pots and pans. In fact, you may have a job to squeeze them into it in the first place. Soaking is the only answer to this problem. You have to soak and roughly scour them, then put them into the machine and hope for the best. If you don't do that, you're doing yourself more than a disservice, for a scrambled-egg saucepan, for instance, that is put straight into a dishwasher will come out with the contents still there, and well and truly baked on—my guess is that you'll need a chisel to scrape it off. If this happens to you, indeed if you have any badly burned saucepan to tackle, try this tip: leave it to soak overnight with a sliced onion and a dessertspoonful of salt in the water inside it, and with luck you'll find it will clean up easily the next morning. Saucepans that have been used for ordinary jobs like sauces or cooking vegetables, will need to have the "plimsoll line" quickly cleaned off them before they go into the machine.

The main advantage of a dishwasher, in my opinion, is that it *does* hide your sluttishness; dirty dishes will sit inside it, indefinitely stowed out of sight—mind you, you could do the same thing by simply stacking them in a plastic basin and shoving it in a cupboard. And the dishes once washed, stay put out of sight until you can summon up the energy to put them away again. But if you're buying a machine for the first time, you'll probably find you need to invest in more cutlery and china too, if you're going to get the best out of it, otherwise you'll be tempted to run it half full, which is expensive, just because you need some clean plates. Be careful what you actually put in to be washed by machine—ivory handled knives are damaged by its process, and the pattern may come off some china, so if you're re-stocking, check that what you buy is machine-washable.

The greatest advantage of a machine wash? Glittering glassware; all dishwashers do them beautifully—just so long as you remember to clear the filter regularly. That's a chore you mustn't miss out on, otherwise you'll find glasses and cups spattered with finely minced tea-leaves and coffee grounds.

Washing up—by hand

Given the right tools—a small brush with a handle, a nylon scouring pad and the heavy-duty mop—wire-wool pads too, plus a pair of rubber gloves to save your hands, washing up isn't half as bad as it's painted. Before you start, check your hands, especially if you're not wearing gloves. If you're one of those people who immerse your watch in the water too in your enthusiasm, drop your rings down the drain, or wonder why the stones look so dull (a grease/detergent scum builds up on the back of the setting) organise a cup-hook screwed into the wall near by, and hang the lot up on it before you get going.

Have plenty of tea-towels at the ready too, be profligate with them, don't be mingy and go on using one until it is grey and smelly. If you swap them over every day you'll have far less work to do when it comes to trying to get them clean. The stains that stay put on tea-towels are almost always the ones that

have been *in situ* for twenty-four hours or more. So get into the habit, when your wash-up is over—certainly at the end of each day—of putting tea-cloths to soak in cold water and biological detergent overnight or for an hour or so. Then you can quickly wash them out and hang them up to dry. The sun, hopefully, will bleach out tea-stains and other marks as they hang on the line, but if their Dalmatian spots bother you, don't buy white towels, go for jazzy checks instead. I use a tea-towel at the end of the day as a damp cloth for mopping over work surfaces and so on. It saves having to have a sad-looking clean-up cloth around, and it dampens down the tea-towel ready for its soak in detergent all night.

Ready to wash? Then get a quick system going—fill the sink with hot, detergent-y water and fling in the cutlery first. Wipe off sticky unpleasant pieces, especially eggy ones, with a piece of paper towel first, then scrape the plates. I use a plastic windscreen scraper for the job; it's marvellous for getting off obstinate things like dried mustard, when a knife might damage the pattern on the china. I use the same tool for getting sticky flour deposits off a pastry board. Scrape the dirty plates into a cardboard box if you have one; it's much easier to use as a rubbish container than the conventional pedal bin, and it's disposable, so you won't have to clean it up afterwards. If you're feeling financially flush, you can invest in a supply of plastic sacks for the same purpose.

Large plates go in next. Float them down so that the hot water gets between them and starts soaking, then finally cups and saucers top the pile, and glasses too, unless you have a large number to tackle—they'll need to be done separately. The cups and glasses which are usually the least greasy and dirty can be whisked around while the rest is having a quick soak underneath. Have water that is as hot as you can bear, have a plastic plate rack to hand, and then you shouldn't have to dry up. Put knives and forks, spoons too, into a colander to drain. I find the basket provided with the average plate rack is fidgety and too small to use.

Got delicate china or glass to do? (It's not likely, if you're reading this book, that you're a household fanatic with Dresden

china in stock, but it could happen.) Then take a clean drying-up cloth or towel and use it to "line" the sink, use another as a pad on the draining board. That way you'll avoid accidental breakages or chips. And if you've got precious plates to store away somewhere and you're afraid of chipping them, think in terms of using a plastic dish-draining rack inside a cupboard for the purpose. This idea works well, incidentally, for things like flan tins, saucepan lids, all those awkward items that come crashing out of the cupboard, normally, when you open the door.

Cut down on the nasties on the washing-up front as much as you can, by switching over to flame-proof oven-to-table ware. This means, generally, cast-iron, flame-proof glass or, at its most basic, cheap enamel-ware from Woolworths. Choose something that can be used over a gas ring for the best advantage, and look for something with an insulated handle (but one that won't melt in intense heat) so you don't burn your hands when you forget to use an oven-cloth. What you're hopefully cutting out, then, is the business of sauté-ing or frying items in one pan before transferring them to slow cook in another—expensive in terms of washing up. Cut down on more nasties by lining items like your grill pan with foil before you start cooking, especially if you are making something messy like Welsh rarebit. It's an easy matter, then, to renew it from time to time. I use foil, too, for a loose-fitting "lid" to go over spattery things like chops when I'm frying them, to cut down on cleaning up the stove afterwards. Milk saucepans are another messy item to clean—but you'll find that if you whip around their insides with a damp dish-cloth the moment you've emptied the milk out, while they're still hot, they should wipe completely clean.

Here is another time-saver on the washing-up front. To save yourself dementedly scrubbing at the chopping board with a Brillo pad to try to remove smelly traces of onion or garlic, because you want to use it for something else, mark one side of the board with a dab of paint to remind yourself and use that side of it purely for smelly things. Leave the other side for fruit and vegetables; then cleaning isn't so difficult. Remember,

by the way, if you want to rid the smell of onions from anything—including your hands—use *cold*, not hot water for the job. The latter only sets the smell in. The cold treatment for onion works well, incidentally, if you're planning to chop one—pop it into the freezing compartment of the fridge for a while beforehand, and its fumes are less likely to hit you in the eye.

Cleaning

So you've got the house more or less straight, the washing up done, now you can tackle any cleaning jobs. Aim high, start at the top of the house and work down, just as you should start a room farthest from the door, and work back towards it. It's an easy matter, at this stage, as you whizz from room to room, to make the beds which have been airing in the meantime. I found I was able to cut down cleaning time by almost a half by a little simple expenditure—on duplicate brushes, dusters and so on which I kept upstairs. I only wish I could afford a second vacuum cleaner too—but I've had an extra long flex fitted to mine which, again, saves all that plugging and unplugging which is such a nuisance. It is best to get it done by a qualified person, but you can do it yourself with care. Detach the plug from the flex and instead attach the wires (joining up the matching colours according to the instructions) to half of a rubber mains flex connector. To the extension flex add the other half of the rubber mains flex connector at one end and the other end to the three-pin plug.

If you baulk at the idea of duplicate tools, do at least carry all your cleaning kit around in a basket so you don't have to keep on going back for things. Hang it up in a cupboard when you've finished, ready for the next time. Start cleaning a room from the top down, if you're doing a thorough job, and as I said, work from the place farthest from the door towards the door. Leave the floor until last.

Use your tools with imagination. For instance, a broom with a duster over the top of it will whip along picture rails in a matter of seconds, saving you having to stand on a chair. If you're an owner of a vacuum cleaner which is static, with attachments,

then cleaning up things like Venetian blinds and furniture, is an easy matter. But if you haven't one, try this cheat. Use a hand dryer for the job instead. It works a treat on blinds, button-back chairs and things like delicate silk lampshades. I find it's good too for getting the dust off louvres on doors. As a last-ditch stand, a damp cloth, or one of those special brushes for removing fluff from velvet will clean up upholstery and other tricky things.

Fitted carpets are a mixed blessing unless you have a cleaner with a hose attachment because none of the upright kind will go right to the wall, but here's a quick tip to do that extra inch. Put on a rubber glove, damp the fingers slightly and draw them along the carpet right close to the wall—you will find that the fluff and dust will cling to it. If you've got wooden or vinyl floors to tackle, get into the habit of going over them with a polishing mop rather than sweeping them. It gets rid of the dust and polishes at the same time—be sure to store its greasy head in a plastic bag, incidentally, before you hang it up or put it away. If your floors are very dusty, as they could be if you live in an old house, then run a vacuum cleaner over them before you use the mop. Plastic foam sheeting wrapped around the bottom of a mop or broom handle will stop it from denting more delicate pieces of furniture or chipping paint off skirting boards if you live in that kind of a house. Lino needs a quick shine but mustn't be slippery. A good treatment for this is a tablespoonful of paraffin mixed with a pint of warm water. Put it on with a mop or with mutton cloth over a broom or an old sock will do—and it makes lino gleaming but not slippery, and you don't need to polish it afterwards. As you go around the floors, wear a plastic bag or carrier bag tucked into your belt or the top of your jeans and use it as a holder for all those stray items you find as you move around—safety pins, pence, hairgrips and so on. Take really stubborn stains off thermoplastic floors with a quick rub with steel wool—you can use it to clean up wooden tables too, if they're pine, or anything that isn't French polished, for it will bring them up like new—but if they've been lacquered in the first place you'll have to go over the whole top, then give it a coat of varnish.

Radiators are absolute blighters to get behind, especially those old-fashioned so-called hospital ones. I've devised my own way of tackling them. I use a broom handle with the ubiquitous plastic-foam sheeting (you can get it from Woolworths) wrapped around it. It will also clean up Venetian-blind slats if you don't have anything else.

Inertia cleaning

Prevention is always better than a cure, as our grannies used to say, and, as cleaning is surely one of the nastiest jobs to do around the house, it pays to take every step you can to let things clean themselves, or stop them from getting messy in the first place—I call it inertia cleaning, and here are a few examples: To save that chore of trying to clean up the fridge, for instance, get into the habit of wiping the bottoms of milk bottles and items like that with a damp cloth as you put them in. You'll soon find that most of the dirt that accumulates on fridge shelves comes from bottles that have been brought straight from the street—or from a cellar for that matter—and put away. The bath is another item that lends itself beautifully to the inertia cleaning system. Persuade your family to use bathsalts every time and you'll escape the task of having to clean up that dreaded ring of scum. At their most basic, bathsalts are merely crushed washing soda, tastefully coloured; you can substitute a bottle of detergent for them if you like, put in a few drops of cochineal or some other cake colouring, and shake it up if you want it to look prettier. And if you baulk at the idea of exposing your body—and theirs—to detergent, remember that that is precisely what bubble baths are made from!

Save another awful chore, cleaning the loo, by installing one of those block cleaner/deodorants in the cistern—it automatically cleans and disinfects for you for the price of a few pence. Another item that I loathe cleaning up is the kettle, but if it becomes too furry inside it takes ages to boil. Using a proprietory de-furrer is a messy business, so do it the inertia way instead: simply pop a glass marble inside, keep it there all the time and it will collect the fur for you—you can then throw

it away and replace it with another one. In a household like ours where people seem to spill things all the time, I couldn't do without a waterproof silicone spray. I use it on all pieces of upholstery, over bedspreads and even over small flat rugs so that anything that gets spilled gets shrugged off by the now-waterproofed surface . . . try it for yourself.

If you're *that* houseproud that you dust the tops of cupboards (and, incidentally, get an eyeful of dust for your trouble) try this inertia tip. Next time, lay sheets of newspaper on the top, then all you need to do is to wrap them up carefully after a while, complete with their dusty contents. I use this system on top of kitchen wall units which otherwise become caked with spots of grease. And one way to cut down on another awful chore—wiping the film of grease off everything and anything that is anywhere near the stove—is to install an extractor fan; the result is amazing. Kitchen cupboards are great places for spills, so legislate for just that, the inertia way: line the shelves with blotting paper in danger areas, so that the spills mop themselves up and, incidentally, avoid dripping on to the shelf beneath. Jam jars and pickle jars, like the milk bottles in the fridge, tend to get dirty with use, so give their bases a quick wipe with that damp cloth before you put them away, and save a lot of trouble prising gluey marks off the shelves later on.

Plagued with one of those old-fashioned ovens that are not self-cleaning? Then cope with it, too, the inertia way. When you've had a cooking session, before the oven temperature has quite cooled down, put in a bowl of household ammonia and shut the door quickly or your eyes will start to stream from the fumes. Leave the ammonia there for several hours—overnight if you can—and you'll find that grease spatters inside the oven will have loosened up miraculously and it's an easy matter to wipe them off. An even better bet, if you can remember to do it, is to line your oven before you start cooking with tin foil which will collect all the grease for you. Be careful, though, that it doesn't come into direct contact with an electrical element or gas jets. You can do the same thing under the hot-plate of an electric cooker, with the same safety proviso, or fit little

"collars" of foil around the parts of the gas rings that get dirtiest. I try to avoid oven cleaning altogether by using self-basting roasting tins, foil lids or clear plastic cook-bags to do things like the joint or a bird—they also help baste the meat, keep it moist and cut down on shrinkage. And if I'm making a pudding, a casserole or anything that might just bubble over the top, I stand the dish inside a larger one with a little water in it, like a bain-marie to collect the drips instead of having them go on to the floor of the oven.

The ubiquitous foil can be used in dozens of ways to help with the inertia cleaning system: use it to line the pan of your scales when you're weighing out anything messy or sticky (re-check the weight balance before you start using it)—it saves the work of cleaning up the pan afterwards. Use it, too, as a "saucer" around the bottom of flower pots on the window-sill to catch drips. You can even use it to line the floor of the budgie cage; it's much easier to manoeuvre in and out than the proprietary linings that look like sandpaper. Foil has another use too—slip some under the ironing-board cover and you'll find that it will reflect the heat and give you a better finish. Store your silver in foil, too, to stop it tarnishing and save you another cleaning chore. If you do happen to have discoloured silverware, incidentally, the most inert way that I know of getting rid of tarnish is to collect a clutch of milk-bottle tops and a handful of salt, put them in plenty of water, and leave the cutlery to soak in that. Tannin is another nasty item to deal with—try making a paste of baking soda and water and wipe the cup insides round with it. Similar stains on plastic items can easily be removed—in fact they simply disappear—if you fill the cup up with a strongish solution of bleach.

Aluminium pans get nasty dull insides, and are a chore to get right again—try this inertia way instead. Cook rhubarb or tomatoes in the pans making sure the liquid comes up to way above the tide-mark, and you'll find it will clean the pan beautifully for you and the food you've cooked is perfectly all right to eat. Tomato skins or rhubarb peelings work equally well, of course.

Save on having to clean up the working-top if you're cooking.

Make a pad of kitchen paper, like a mat and put it on the work-top right by the stove, then greasy pans or dishes that are hot can be put on it, leaving rings on the paper, not on the work-top. Tea drips are another nuisance (bleach will get them off melamine surfaces). If your tea pot plays up in this way, cut a little ring out of a scrap of foam rubber or plastic and fit it over the spout, just below the lip. Plastic foam makes an excellent "sausage", too, to push down those narrow gaps between kitchen appliances or work tops (double it over and push it down in place with a pencil or a knitting needle). It makes a marvellous inertia way of keeping those irritating little gaps free from grease and particles of food.

Four final tips on the cleaning front: a soft, though not necessarily sable, artist's paint brush is ideal for cleaning up those taradiddles like the mouldings on picture rails. Damp it very slightly first and it will pick up the dust much faster. And while I'm on the subject of brushes, a house-painter's brush is another item that will tackle louvre doors and Venetian blinds. And if you're cleaning a shelf or cupboard over a wash-basin, put a plastic bowl in the basin, better still, a tray on top. It's during cleaning that most of those accidents happen—bottles falling in and causing awful cracks—this way you can catch them before they do any damage. Trying to clean under a chest of drawers? Don't go crazy struggling to get underneath. Simply take out the bottom drawer and shove the brush or the vacuum cleaner nozzle in through the space.

And when you're cleaning or dusting anything, don't forget that you've got two hands to use, to use two cloths at once—and if you're short on dusters, remember a pair of old socks over each hand like mittens does the job wonderfully well.

DON'T PUT IT DOWN, PUT IT AWAY

We're all conned by those gleaming colour advertisements in the Sunday supplements and by specially created room sets in furniture departments in the big stores, into thinking that *the* best way to live is in clear uncluttered surroundings. You know the scene . . . the kitchen that seems to contain acres of gleaming, virgin Formica, the living room in which each piece of furniture is placed like an *objet d'art* with space around it. In

my time I've helped photograph many people's homes, and in each case I noticed, the photographer insisted that half the furniture and the knick-knacks were carted out of the room altogether, before he set to work "re-arranging" it.

Real life is not like that. In real life living, believe it or not, those very clear stretches of nothing around the furniture, those clear working-tops, spell trouble. In the kitchen, for instance, just put down a packet of cornflakes, a plate and spoon and they instantly look untidy, rather like guardsmen out of step. Have a kitchen that is really super-modern, and you'll find you are for ever putting things away. The same goes for a living room too, so the first lesson is clutter hides clutter. In other words, a chatty, cheerful room arrangement with table-tops and shelves already crammed with bits and pieces, can accommodate other bits that shouldn't really be there, without giving away the game. Junior's half-made plane model won't be noticed on a side table that has photos, vases and other knick-knacks on top. And the same thing goes in the kitchen. Turn it into one that is designed farmhouse style, with a comfortable dresser, the window-sill chock-a-block with growing plants, then a few half-empty baked-bean tins simply won't show.

So if your family is naturally the untidy, cheerful, busy kind that is always *doing* things, tending to leave half-made things, half-read books and bits of knitting lying about, switch your décor to fit around them, otherwise you're going to give yourself a nervous breakdown with all that constant putting away and nagging. Shelves and table tops loaded with interesting things confuse the eye, and look better anyway.

Clutter hides clutter

This clutter theory works in other ways too, particularly on the time and labour-saving front. Patterned carpets show the dirt stains far less than plain ones that cry out to be cleaned at every opportunity. I say this with great feeling, having made the fatal mistake of installing a purple carpet in my dining room, which shows up every crumb like a jewel. There is an apocryphal story about a stately home where the owner was showing visitors around the state sitting room and one of them looked

at the (apparently) patterned carpet and asked, "Aubusson?" "No," replied the duke tartly, "Dachshund." So if you have puppies to contend with, a patterned carpet is a must. Patterned lino, too, looks better than plain in a household where muddy feet and paw-marks are part of life's rich tapestry, especially on rainy days. Make sure that the pattern looks fairly confusing and, hopefully, has some brown in it. Black and white squares are disaster, though you can just about get away with them if they are marbled. I well remember in one kitchen I owned having to wipe the white bits several times a day.

By the same token, wallpaper is much more accommodating than paint, especially if there are small children and, therefore, sticky fingers around. I'm assuming that you use vinyl which is now available in most of the attractive up-market patterns, and in the kitchen and bathroom, patterned wall tiles which will accommodate splatter marks like toothpaste, and shaving soap reasonably well. A word here about bathrooms, by the way. Don't think that having a coloured suite, or coloured tiles will make life easier—it won't. Plain white can take those toothpaste marks much better, and a tide-mark round the bath shows up much more on a coloured background than on a plain white one, where it can just be taken for a shadow.

Keeping the house under control boils down, in the main, to one thing—proper storage. If you can put things away, instead of simply putting them down, then you're halfway there. But, more often than not, there simply *is* nowhere to put the items away and they get stacked in corners instead. *You* may think you haven't got any more storage space going begging in your house, but let's just take a look at one or two spots that tend to get forgotten. The garage, for instance. Are you using it properly? Few cars actually fill up the space available completely, but it does tend to get cluttered round the edges with items like bicycles, garden tools and so on. Hang these on the wall or suspend them overhead—you can buy fitments specially for just that purpose in ironmongers' shops, and you'll find you've bonus space to store the kind of items that you only use occasionally, or like Christmas decorations,

only once a year at that. Swimwear, ski-clothes and equipment, books that the children have yet to grow into, can all be stored in boxes in the garage—they could even have a range of shelves put up for them. Label your boxes first with bold chalked signs so that you know exactly what's in them, and so they can be read from a distance. Have a family purge from time to time, when you encourage the rest of the mob to go through their things and pitch out what they *think* they don't want, then store them for six months in a halfway house—in the garage. If during that time they haven't been retrieved, then throw them out or send them to a jumble sale. Remember, too, that children grow out of their clothes faster than you think, so have a quick check from time to time to make sure their wardrobes are not cluttered with unnecessary bits and pieces. These can be stored in the garage until jumble-sale time comes around. Be ruthless about rubbish, it's the only way to stay sane. Faded birthday cards, old theatre programmes and happy family snaps stored in one box will keep small children quiet for hours on rainy days, but anything that bugs you, like a slightly blunt tin opener, a saucepan that always burns things, strange shaped dishes you never use, should be given away, thrown out, above all, got rid of, for the kitchen is the place that gets most cluttered, when all's said and done.

Cleared out what you can? Banished some of it to the garage? Then resign yourself to what's left, and see if you can't find new places in which to store it. There are all sorts of hidden spots in any house, however well planned, that will take extra items. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that you can usually double the amount of storage space available, if you go around the house with that idea in mind, looking for new places.

Search for new storage space

Your wardrobe doesn't go all the way up to the ceiling? Use that "dead" space on top for storage. If it's built in, then think about having another set of doors fitted on top. The space under the stairs can be used to house a deep freeze or any of those awkward items you can't find space for elsewhere, just as long as you have a decent light fitted, and even the stairs

themselves can be pressed into service. There's nothing to stop you taking up the horizontal part of the bottom step or even two and replacing it, hinged, as a lid—the space inside makes a marvellous spot for things like shoe cleaning materials or indeed, shoes.

The insides of deep cupboard doors, especially in places like airing cupboards, can be used for extra storage. Fix wire half-baskets, the kind that are used for patio plants, or bicycle baskets on to the back of them, or even lightweight plastic window-boxes on hooks to store things like tools and small items like socks and pants that always get lost. Think in terms of extra storage in a large through room by setting a see-through unit at right angles to a wall where it doubles as a room divider. The result? More storage space but no loss of that long view. Going back to the backs of cupboard doors, they're marvellous for keeping flat things like umbrellas, tennis rackets and empty handbags at the ready. Use magnets to store awkward things on the back of small cupboard doors—you can usually buy them in toy or model-making shops. Stick them in place with an impact adhesive like Araldite. They could go inside the fronts of drawers too, and use them to cling things like keys, screwdrivers or nail files into place where you can lay your hands on them instantly. A magnet is a good item to fix on the wall right next to the main fuse box, with screwdriver, small torch (metal, and the screwdriver too) so you can find them easily in the inevitable dark that accompanies a fuse going.

Another item that goes well on the back of cupboard doors is that multi-shoe holder on a hanger. Don't just use one for shoes, buy several and use them for spare plugs and lightbulbs, larger tools that can't be "hung" up by a magnet, or for a series of cloths and polishes.

Use chests of drawers in unexpected places—one in the hall, for instance, will make a quick instant put away place for items like gloves, scarves, hats, the odd schoolbooks and newspapers. Just open the drawers and shove them in. A bottom drawer is ideal for things like wellies or shoes. If you're finicky, you could always line it first with something like Fablon to make it wipe clean. Two matching chests of drawers could be

put on top of one another to make a tallboy—take the legs off the top one if it has some. Another useful item is anything that is basically a box with a lid on it—like a monk's chest. It makes yet another receptacle for damp wellies or parcels you've just brought home from the shops and don't want to deal with right away. And on the subject of dumping things when you first come in, take a second look at your hall or back porch, if it's long and thin, consider blocking off the tail end in the form of a cupboard in which all the clutter like coats and shoes can go. Never, ever fall for the trap of having a row of hooks in the hall to hang clothes on; if necessary stow them under the stairs, otherwise you'll never, ever have a neat entrance to your house.

Wardrobes are another headache. There never seems to be enough space in them, and they are one item you should never scrimp and save on. Cut-price wardrobes almost inevitably are just an inch or two too narrow to take clothes properly, and you end up having to put your hangers on the slant. Take a hanger with you to test this theory out when you are buying, and allow a little extra for the cloth that is to go over them. Wardrobes with sliding doors are the most frustrating items of furniture I've ever come across; you can be sure that whatever you want is behind the wrong door. The most satisfying form of clothes storage I've ever found is a deep, walk-in cupboard or a slightly over-sized built-in one with a portable garment rail on wheels inside—the kind of thing they use in the big stores and in dress manufacturer's show-rooms. You can often buy them for a song, second-hand, from shop fitters or look in *Exchange and Mart*. Hang your clothes on them, and you can wheel the whole lot out into the centre of the room in a minute to select what you want, and then stow it away just as fast. A garment rail of this kind could easily be kept behind a heavy curtain in an alcove if you haven't the right kind of cupboard space; it could also be used in a cupboard in the hall for outdoor things, so think about it. Another part of the house that gets overlooked in the great storage hunt is the spare room. Use it for long-term projects like dressmaking or perpetual boring tasks like ironing. You can then close the door on whatever you're doing and walk away from the chore.

Shelving can be a mixed blessing. I certainly find those ladder fittings with adjustable shelving on brackets more trouble than they are worth. They seem fine, on the face of it, but they do make a mess of your wall, and they are fiddly to fix. The intervals at which you can put the shelves are often just not right, the ladder part shows in almost every case and seldom if ever can anyone be bothered to alter the shelving around because of all the work involved in taking things down first. Another mistake that lots of people make is having shelves too deep, so you can't see what is at the back of them. More times than not you'll simply store items in a single row on them anyway, when they're difficult to reach. If you're stuck with wide shelves like this in the kitchen, it pays to have them re-set at a forward sloping angle, and put a little guard rail in front. Then anything at the back slides forward to replace items you take out of stock. Don't forget to tuck away extra shelving in cupboards to make the most of the space available. It's far better, for instance, to have fairly narrow—say twelve-inch wide—shelves on the inside, then fit another narrow set to the back of the cupboard door. That way you can see where things are instantly. And if there's no room for shelving on the inside of the door, consider covering it with cheap mirror tiles—it helps to "light up" the inside of the cupboard when you peer in. Make maxi use out of mini-shelves, particularly in the kitchen area. Even if you don't want to hang your cups up, cup hooks fixed on the narrow side facing edge can be used to take other things —scissors, for instance. And don't forget you can buy special slot-in fitments to take items like spice jars on the underside of the shelf itself. If you think the resulting display looks unsightly, then buy yourself a cheap bright roller blind or two and fit it so that it pulls down to cover the mess.

Take a walk around the house when the weekend is over; that's the time to see which rooms are the untidiest, and need special measures. You'll probably find they are the ones with the least storage space on tap. Try to keep things where they are going to be used to save your time. Don't stow spare loo paper, soap and so on in a kitchen cupboard, find space for it in the bathroom—the airing cupboard is as good a place as

any—or buy a seat with a lid on it for the bathroom itself that will hold them inside. Keep spare sheets in the bedrooms where they are to go: you could possibly stow them in plastic bags under the bed if you haven't anywhere else. Never let them clutter up an airing cupboard indefinitely. For one thing they will tend to yellow, in time, in the constant heat.

Supermarket baskets—you can buy them, so don't be tempted to pinch them—are ideal holders for things like children's shoes, socks or pants as everything is instantly getatable, and you can lift the basket down from a shelf or cupboard, take out what you want, then put it away again without leaving a disorderly mess. Do what the continental housewives do and store small items of household linen like napkins or tea-towels folded then rolled into sausages and stowed in ranks like sardines. That way it is easy to pick out matching sets. Store sweaters in plastic bags to keep them clean and keep out the moths, and you can do the same thing with tights and scarves which always look untidy. I keep my junk jewellery hung up in a clear plastic bag too, so I can see instantly what there is available. Belts are a nuisance, and best clasped around the clothes rail for instant reference or hung by a clothes peg with a hook on it, suspended from a shelf. Use those see-through wire basket "Beanstalk" racks which stack on top of one another in dead spaces like the middle to bottom area of a cupboard. They'll take sweaters, socks, underpants too, so that they can be instantly seen. The wire racks lift out easily for re-filling, so you can take a pile under your arm to the ironing board to re-load them.

Ideas for the kitchen

The kitchen comes in for most criticism, usually, in terms of storage space. Finding extra working-top room becomes difficult once you've started collecting items like a mixer, a toaster, an electric kettle. In extremis don't forget that a kitchen drawer, pulled a little way out, will support a chopping board nicely, and two level ones, pulled out side by side can even support an ironing board if you haven't floor space for one with legs. Use cardboard boxes from the supermarket as much as you

can for storing clattery, awkward things like cake tins if they haven't got special holders, and if you don't like the look of the boxes, you can always pretty them up with wallpaper or Fablon. (I once knew a woman who was so dainty that she Fablon-ned her dustbins, but I think this is going a bit *too* far.)

Tea-towels always look untidy, especially in those nasty poke-in holders on the wall. Try hanging them on a miniature clothes line in a cupboard under the sink instead, or on a multi-skirt hanger on the back of a cupboard door. Another idea is to suspend some clothes pegs from a hanger or a rod, and clip them on to that, out of sight somewhere. Paper towels don't look particularly nice, either. I find they stow away just as well in the front of a drawer with a small "tongue" hanging out, the drawer not quite closed. If you haven't a holder at all, and don't want to use a drawer for the purpose, simply thread the towel on a washing line or string and suspend it via two drawing pins inside a convenient cupboard—it works better that way, anyway. Another place for a kitchen towel or indeed a roll of loo paper if that's what you use for clean-ups around the kitchen, is on a holder or on the ubiquitous line of string fixed underneath a kitchen table, where it's right at hand but can't be seen . . . ah! the cunning of it all!

Use usual things for unusual purposes—a toast rack, for instance, makes a marvellous rack for bills or, indeed, for folded paper bags, if you're the kind of person that hoards them. It will also take items like instant soup mix and sauce mixes, so you can lay your hands on them in a minute. Be flexible in your ideas—even an old filing cabinet can be pressed into service to store dirty/clean washing.

WELL, AT LEAST THEY'RE CLEAN...

If there's one part of housework that you can't, really, duck out of—not without spending a lot of hard cash, anyway—it's washday. The weekly clothes-cycle of wear-wash-dry-iron-put away-and wear again, grinds on inexorably. But with a bit of

forethought and cunning you can cut down on the hard labour quite considerably, and even skip one stage or two, whether you're a washing-machine owner or one of the launderette brigade.

One of the greatest curses of washday now is the sorting stage, and the more sophisticated your washing machine, the more carefully things have to be segregated. So the first practical way to cut down on time and trouble is to standardise, whenever you can, the fibre in the clothes you buy, so that they fall basically into two or three groups only—nylon, rayon and cotton, for instance, because that will simplify the whole sorting process. And if you think that there are only a few categories of fibres, let me tell you that there must be more than fifty different brands of man-made fibres alone, to choose from. Here, for starters, is a list of the main groups of fabrics, each of which need a different treatment from the rest, especially if you have a fully automatic machine with set water temperatures:

White cotton and linen
Colourfast cotton, linen and rayon
Coloured cotton, linen and rayon
White nylon
Coloured nylon and Terylene
Cottons and rayons with special finishes
Acrylic/cotton mixtures
Wool and wool mixtures
Acrilan, Courtelle and Tricel
Wool/Terylene blends
Washable pleated garments containing Acrylic fibre
Glass fibre

So the message comes over loud and clear: look carefully at the washing instructions on standard garments like T-shirts, plain tops, shirts and blouses before you buy, and try to cut down your washday programme to two batches of clothes at the two main wash temperatures—sixty degrees centigrade (for white nylon, cottons, linens and some rayons) and forty degrees centigrade (for wool, wool mixtures, acrylics and most

coloured nylons). What you want to avoid is having six or seven heaps of different wash programmes. Keep an eye on your ironing time too, when you're buying. Unless you are able to send household linen to the laundry for instance (the best washday cheat of all) it pays you to replace pure cotton or linen sheets, as they wear out, with cotton/polyester mix ones instead. The family are not likely to notice the difference, and provided you either tumble dry them or give them plenty of hanging space on the line to spread out, they won't need ironing at all. The same goes, of course, for cotton/polyester mix shirts which look very much like pure cotton, are not much hotter to wear, and which don't give off the perspiration smell that you get with impervious nylon ones.

Avoid, like the plague, things that need hand washing, if you can, unless they are special fashion garments that make it all worthwhile. Angora, fine Botany wool that has not been pre-treated for the washing machine and pure silk all look and feel very nice, but they're for special occasion clothes only, otherwise you'll find they spend more time abandoned at the bottom of the laundry basket than they do on your back, for there's always some excuse why you shouldn't wash them out there and then.

Think for a moment, do you really *need* a washing machine, as such? Or should you patronise the launderette instead? If you live just a few doors from one, and if you don't have a large weekly wash, then it might be better to let someone else's machine do the job. If you can dovetail your washing in with your shopping, so that you are not hanging around, there are a lot of advantages of using the launderette's facilities. They're equipped with automatic water softening equipment for instance, which gives a better wash, they also usually have giant tumbler driers which can cope with a load quickly—an advantage in bad weather. But if you have, as I had for years, a machine-load of washing to do every day, then it would work out wildly expensive. Another advantage of the launderette if your kitchen is small is that it frees valuable space for something else—perhaps a dishwasher. The only way to work out the economics is to see, at your particular rate of washing, how long a machine

would take to pay for itself, at launderette prices. I reckon that if you only wash once a week, it would take six years or more to get your money back on a machine costing around £100. But if you have six children, if your husband comes home with dirty overalls, if you have to hump your washing some way to the nearest launderette, then a machine is the only answer—but which one?

Choosing a machine

In doing the laundry we're going through three processes: getting the dirt out of the clothes in the first place, then rinsing them, then removing as much excess water as we can. The fully automatic machine does all this work for you, and probably heats the washing water too, but it takes a long time to complete its wash cycle. You can switch it on and walk away, it's true, but once it has started work you can't interrupt the process (or you are not supposed to) to remove, say, the odd garment that must not be spun-dried, or add something you forgot to put in. And you may find yourself helplessly watching your week's wash turn a livid pink because you've put in something that "bleeds", or you may have half an hour or more of terrifying rattling as Junior's toy car (left in his trouser pocket) rackets around the drum. An automatic machine is ideal for a large family whose clothes fall into just a few washing categories, and it will also make the business of nappy washing easier and more pleasant, but if there are just two or perhaps three of you, a twin-tub might be more flexible and get more use.

Using a twin-tub machine properly—starting off with hot water, putting cottons in, then dumping them in the spin dryer while you use the same, now cooler water, for other things —you can get your weekly wash done in far less time. But it is a messy business, yanking wet garments in and out, and you can't simply leave the machine to get on with it, and do other jobs around the house. In fact, when you take into account all that emptying and refilling, you do a good half of the work by hand. Twin-tub machines have one advantage over automatics apart from time-saving: the spin dryer is far more efficient in

getting rid of excess water than one on a fully automatic machine. But if you are doing most of the work by hand, do you really need a washing machine at all? Perhaps you would be better off with a spin-dryer, a tumble dryer and your own two hands.

Washing, *en masse* is not the hard work it used to be, because man-made fibres don't absorb the dirt in the way that wools and cottons do. A good quick way to get it over and done with is to do it in the bath; get a good amount of hand-hot water, and a lather going and you'll be able to do the entire wash at once. And for bulky things like sheets, try jumping in (with bare clean feet, of course) and doing them Dhobi fashion, jumping up and down on them, treading out the dirt. When it comes to rinsing, it's an easy matter to pull out the plug, leave them for a while to drain while you get on with something else, then refill with cold water for a rinse. If you use the bath method, have the spin dryer near to hand to save carting wet heaps around the house.

Fully automatic machines have to be plumbed in place (and it can cost you anything up to an extra £25 to have this done) and some of them have to be bolted to the floor too. If it needs fixing that way, believe me, there's a reason for it: we once bought a second-hand Bendix automatic which was supposed to be fixed to the floor. "A lot of nonsense," said my husband loftily, and simply had it plumbed into place. All was well until it got into its spin-dry cycle, when it started a wild dervish dance across the kitchen floor towards me. There's no reason why the smaller, less automatic washing machines shouldn't be plumbed in too, if you use them at the spot where they are normally kept. Any machine that pumps out into the sink is a nuisance; half the time you forget, and leave washing up there, covering over the drain, with the result that the sink overflows on you. Worse still, the hoses on many machines have a life of their own when water is being pumped out through them, and snake around spraying hot water all over the room unless they are secured. So it would pay you to save yourself time and trouble in the long run and have a permanent fixture of some sort. Household walls are not sacrosanct and it can cost

surprisingly little to have a hole cut in the brickwork to poke the outlet hose though, then a piece of plastic drainpipe outside to house it, and lead the water away to a drain.

If you're doing do-it-yourself washing as far as things like handkerchiefs, household linen, especially sheets are concerned, give yourself a holiday once in a while—take a batch to the laundry every month or so for a freshen up. There's no doubt that white things washed at home do get dingy looking compared with those that are professionally done, so keep them up to scratch with an occasional perk up that way. One last word on the washing-machine front: washing powder, spilled around the top, as it inevitably is, will take enamel or paint off the machine in no time at all, so to avoid having an unsightly rusted superstructure, keep a damp cloth somewhere near by to quickly wipe off any spills as they occur.

Sorting

You practically need to be an industrial chemist, nowadays, to know what sort of fabric you are handling when you come to do the weekly wash, but sorting beforehand is vital. We all know that moment of anguish when we find a cherished woollen sock has been boiled inadvertently with the sheets. But there are ways of cutting down on sorting time: don't just have one laundry bag, switch to three or four, according to how many different programmes your washing machine takes. Get into the habit, when you put clothes out to be washed, of automatically stashing them away in the correct colour-coded bag. When washday arrives double-check your sorting; empty the bag out on the floor—scattered that way you're much more likely to notice mistakes like socks that have got in among the sheets. Quickly check over the main items to make sure there are no tears in them—you'll save yourself a lot of time later, mending, if you tackle this *before* the clothes go into the machine, for they'll be twice as bad, otherwise, when they come out. Check too for stains. Some things may need to go into soak, on other stubborn marks try using Swarfega, that jelly-like stuff that is sold to clean up your hands; it works wonders with odd greasy stains. If you've got serious stains to tackle, now

is the time to do them, *not* after they've been set by the hot water in the machine. Stretch the fabric over an embroidery hoop, if you have one, to do the job and you'll find your labours are much more effective, especially if you are coping with things like marks left by ballpoint pens. These tend to smear, and the only way to deal with them I've found, is to hold a pad of kitchen paper over the top, then dot them from underneath with pencil wrapped in a tissue, then with methylated spirit—do it as accurately as you can to stop it spreading. You'll find on p. 126 a quick guide to coping with the most common household stains.

Few washing machines can deal, unaided, with grease marks along the fold line of shirt collars, and the quickest way to tackle them is to soak the collar, then stretch the fold line out over the edge of a basin or sink and scrub at it with a nail brush and detergent. Remember, too, that there's nothing to stop you using Swarfega or a dry-cleaning solvent on it before you put it into the wash.

Greasy overalls are another bug-bear in the wash, and if this is something you have to cope with on a regular basis, try this tip: leave them to soak overnight in a thick starch solution after you've washed them, then iron them on the inside when they are almost dry—the starch forms a layer to stop the grease soaking through. If you've small children around, an item that causes more trouble in the wash than anything else is chewing gum. Try to ban it as you will, there inevitably comes a time when you're stuck (literally) with it. Plasticine and modelling clay are other nasties to remove from clothing but if you've a freezer, or a freezing compartment in your fridge, it all becomes easy: just bung the garment into it for a while, and the offending gum becomes a hard lump that you can easily pick off.

When you're ready to wash, make sure that anything with a zip in it is zipped up. Half the trouble with most zippers—and many of them are made from a form of nylon—is that they tend to distort in hot water, but if they're already closed, the teeth are less likely to get out of true. Turn anything with bits attached to it—belts, ties etc.—inside out, before putting it in the machine, to cut down on tangling and always be sure to

turn anything with a metal trim or a buckle on it inside out so that the metal doesn't scratch the drum of the machine. And to save that terrible heads-bodies-and-legs mass of twisted stockings and sleeves, bra straps and suspender belts, put small items like tights into a pillow case and tie it at the top, then put it in the machine and they'll wash perfectly well, but they won't get joined together in holy matrimony in the process. Alternatively, if you're doing them by hand and you're in a hurry, rinse them by spraying them with a shower attachment; it forces the detergent bubbles out in double-quick time. Use a shower-attachment too for rinsing items like flannels and handkerchiefs if you are doing them by hand; it makes the process more pleasant.

Sort out pastels, whites and bright colours. Nothing that is white should be done with anything coloured as there is always a danger that it will become grey in tone. Always *assume* that anything new that is black, red, purple or brown, in fact, anything that is brightly coloured, especially in "fugitive" shades like blue, is not going to be colourfast and treat it accordingly. One way to check is to dampen a corner with hot water, then iron it over an old piece of sheet. For hand washing, a mix of cold water and vinegar for a final rinse will help "set" the colour for next time around. You can use colour bleeding sometimes to your advantage. For instance, whenever I buy a new pair of jeans, I always wash them with everything blue I can find, knowing that they will bleed. They then perk up all the other garments and make them look a little less faded.

Drying

Comes drying time, and it pays to be well organised in terms of what to put where. Cottons are the only items that really benefit from being hung out of doors; then with luck you will have them in a really tip-top condition to iron. I prefer the trad clothes line to the whirligig variety. I know that the latter is neater to look at but they're a nuisance to hang things on, and clothes don't dry so fast because they blanket each other in the process. Save ironing time as you dry. It pays to tumble-dry cotton/polyester shirts if you have a machine for the job because

you certainly won't need to iron them, and the money spent in using the machine is probably less than the cost of heat for the iron. Hang trousers up, always by the legs, folded down the creases, of course; the weight of the waistline and the top helps to smooth out the fabric as they dry, and cuts down on ironing time. The same dodge works for net curtains; if they're hung threaded on plastic-coated wire, leave it in place when you wash them, hang them up with the wire at the bottom and its weight will keep them smooth.

It's a waste of time, basically, to hang fiddly things like pants and socks out of doors, especially if they are made from man-made fabrics, so either put them all in a string bag and hang them on the line like that or take the bag indoors, hang it in a warm place—over a boiler, for instance—and plunge your hand in and turn them over from time to time to help them dry off.

If you're doing several washes, don't be tempted to polish them off the same day. That way you have a house full of dripping washing if the weather is bad. It's far better to spread them out through the week. If you have a central heating boiler stowed away somewhere, investigate the possibility of having slatted shelves built over the top of it, or just a washing line with some hangers slung over it, so that on wet days you can dry off clothes around it, rather than in the kitchen where, instead of having that laundry-fresh look, they may well end up with a vague aroma of fried onions. *Don't* use a clothes-horse if you can possibly help it. Not only is it a positive death-trap if it is put anywhere near a naked flame, but people will keep knocking it over, and you will almost certainly end up sooner or later with clothes to re-wash.

Ironing

Keep the ironing chores as easy as you can. Iron, if possible, near to where the clothes eventually have to go; in a spare bedroom upstairs for instance, and use a trolley to stack your finished items on, so you can wheel it straight to the airing cupboard or to a wardrobe. Don't make heavy weather of the task, get used to ironing sitting down (don't forget all boards are adjustable) and learn to be ambidextrous—use both hands

to wield the iron so you don't have to keep shifting to reach another part of the board.

Save time on things like sheets and handkerchiefs by using them as temporary ironing-board covers. Fold each item as neatly as you can, then iron other things on top of it, turning it from time to time, or you can duck out of ironing handkerchiefs altogether by flattening and smoothing them out on the side of a bath to dry, or any flat surface, best of all on a smooth radiator. Don't give yourself unnecessary trouble by ironing things that are too dry. Either damp them down beforehand by throwing handfuls of water over them, then rolling them up tightly and leaving them for a while or, better still, fling them in a tumble dryer with a wet garment or a damp sponge and give them a whirl for a minute or two. This system works marvellously, by the way, if you want to get creases out of a heavy item like a coat or suit. And if you realise you won't have time to complete the run, provided you don't leave damp things around for more than a couple of days, you can sling them into a plastic bag where they'll keep themselves in a nicely moist state until you are ready for them.

Men's shirts are the worst thing to tackle, particularly when their gorilla-length sleeves drag on the floor. To avoid getting scruffy cuffs this way, press the sleeves first then button them together, temporarily, under the ironing board while you tackle the rest. You don't, I hope, iron anything that is not actually seen—old shirts that are to be worn under sweaters only need their collars and cuffs done.

Dodgy items like velvet are best cared for in a way that they never need ironing. Never let them get crushed in a crowded wardrobe, for instance, give them plenty of breathing space. But if they do need sprucing up, there are two ways to tackle them: either hang them up in a hot steamy bathroom to bring up the pile, then pop them into a plastic garment bag until they are needed, or, better still, give them a whirl in the ubiquitous tumble dryer with a damp sponge for company. Velvet ribbon should not be pressed either—simply stand the iron on end and pull the ribbon carefully back and forth over the sole-plate.

An iron that has a sticky deposit on the bottom can cause

havoc on delicate clothes. If the mess won't come off with the careful use of a Brillo pad, try spraying the bottom of the iron with aerosol oven cleaner; that usually does the trick. Another item that should never be ironed is angora. This, too, will come up in the tumble drier, this time without a damp sponge in tow, but another dodge which works surprisingly well is to put the sweater in the fridge for a while. The cold literally makes its hairs stand on end.

What about those oh-so-delicate garments like fine blouses that crease at the drop of a hat? It's fine to iron them right away if you have plenty of space and can put them on a hanger and give them lots of elbow room. Otherwise save your energy, don't waste time ironing them at all at this juncture. Simply put them away in a drawer, as they are for the moment, and then when you want to wear them, get them out, press them and put them straight on for a bandbox look.

Stowing clothes away is just about the most boring part of the whole washing routine, but you can save a lot of time sorting out things for the airing cupboard by firmly establishing communal sets of basics like underclothes. All the men could share a common pants pool, for instance, and one for socks. If someone cares *that* much about a particular pair, they can fish them out of the pile, but otherwise it is much easier to have, say, two drawers or baskets in the airing cupboard, into which everyone dips. Save time too by standardising on socks. Choose one particular colour and brand, perhaps grey. It will save all the feverish matching up that goes on otherwise, and means that if one sock of a pair wears out, the other can be cannibalised for further use.

Mark your sheets in *each* corner when you buy them with the letters S or D so you can tell in a second, when you're in a hurry to make a bed up, which is for a single, which is for a double. And if you're the kind of family who stick to their own personal towels, get each member to choose a colour of their own, and stick to it. Jimmy is orange, Jenny is pink and so on. It's an easy matter, then, to identify what belongs to whom. You could carry the personal colour scheme right the way through to flannels and tooth brushes as well.

Not In Front Of The Children

I used to have a fantasy of myself, as a mother figure, long before I had any children, sitting, placidly, embroidering under a tree in an orchard with my (four) babies frolicking happily at my feet. I can remember them quite well; they all had curly hair, they were all like little chubby angels, *and they were all smiling*.

In practice I stopped at motherhood after two—and I never did get that orchard, either. My children disappointingly turned out to look rather like skinned rabbits and they yelled; no way did they conform to those chuckling cherubs. What is more, they refused to do what I wanted them to do, and went their own sweet way, which consisted of doing things like painting the dog with cod-liver oil, taking toads to bed with them and generally not conforming. Children, I found early on, are difficult, harrassing, above all *worrying*. I don't think I even knew what it was like to be really worried until I had children. My first baby frightened me so much that when he was quiet I thought he was dead, when he cried I thought he was dying. When I asked the doctor if it was safe to take him on a trip abroad, at eighteen months old, he replied, "The child will be fine—it's *you* I'm worried about." But, let's face it, children are here to stay, once you've had them, and the only way to avoid being a nervous wreck and not go under is to work out some sort of *modus vivendi* if the house is not going to become a battlefield between *us* and *them*. But don't imagine, if you have tiny tots around you, that life becomes easier as they get older—it doesn't—they become larger, noisier, and, what is more, they start raiding your drinks! But it's the smaller children I'm mainly concerned with here, because one or two small adjustments around the house can make all the difference in the world, from your point of view, and theirs.

The main thing is to go with the tide, rather than fight against it. In other words, if you have toddlers around lock up anything precious—put away those coffee-table books, assume that the worst will happen and legislate for it. Assume that they will try to stick their fingers up electric light sockets, expect that they will "play" with your hi-fi, bouncing the diamond stylus merrily up and down on your Deutsche Grammophon LP and take preventive action *before* it all happens, rather than afterwards. In short, it pays to be something of a pessimist.

Remember too, that all children are messy—if it's not one end that is causing trouble, it's the other, so arm yourself with a roll of kitchen paper or loo paper to have on hand to cope

with messy fingers and worse, and to give a quick clean up to a murky face. Spread more paper—newspaper this time—several thicknesses deep, not just on the table but on the floor around it too, before letting children loose on a painting or playing session of almost any kind—especially if it includes modelling clay or plasticine.

Meals are bound to be something of a shambles for the first few years, but you can save yourself time over the nursery washing up if you're serving soggy sandwiches or boiled eggs with "soldiers" of bread dipped in. Spread a sheet of kitchen towel over the plate, then put the food on it. That way bits of shell, drips of egg etc. will blot themselves on it, and make clearing the plates an easier business altogether. Don't encourage them to walk from room to room, carrying food—this often happens when everyone is anxious to go and watch telly—bits and crumbs drop on the floor and over the furniture making your job of clearing up next day twice as difficult. If they *must* take their tea into the lounge (and with this in mind, it's often a good idea to admit defeat and move the telly into a room where meals are served) then make them carry things in on a tray and eat off that; this at least acts as a catchment area for drips, or crumbs. Encourage them to eat out of doors as much as possible. Have some sort of sitting-out area organised, because then you can leave the clearing up to the birds—it's amazing how eating *al fresco* cuts down on the chores.

Sugar is an item that children seem to delight in spilling, missing the target every time, when they spoon it over their cereal. Buy one of those automatic dispensers—the kind you get in coffee bars—for them to use. It's un-chic but very practical and saves spillage.

If you take my advice, on page 76, school sandwiches are no longer a problem because you can do them for the week and freeze them, or for half a week and keep them, wrapped, in the fridge. But another item that arises is the sudden help-yourself snack when mother finds herself stuck in the rush-hour or under the dryer, and her loved ones are sitting, starving at home. Legislate for this kind of emergency by keeping food in

the freezer, or the freezing compartment of the fridge that the children can fix it themselves. Encourage them to do their own suppers from time to time and don't be purist—heaven sakes, frozen chips and beefburgers never hurt anyone as an occasional treat, and baked beans make the nearest thing to an instant meal that I can think of. Do you have feeding problems? Well get them to eat anything as long as you can get them to clear their plates. Disguise milk shamelessly in the form of milk shakes or those instant-whip type puddings if they won't drink it straight. Fling extra eggs into items like rice pudding if they won't have them fried or boiled, sling one into mashed potato too. And when an infant wrinkles up his nose and wails when you spoon-feed him food from a tin, take a mouthful yourself (have you ever actually *tasted* what baby food is like? Do you wonder that they object?) and see if there isn't something you can do to liven it up. A new syndrome is the child who announces that it is going vegetarian. Lie shamelessly in this case, and say the mince is made from soya bean.

On the clothes kick

When it comes to organising their wardrobe, remember dark or bright coloured clothes can always be sponged clean; light clothes will show a ring if you do. So for general knock-about wear, pick things in bright colours, preferably with a pattern; they will show far less than something plain will. It's ironic, when you come to think of it, that we dress babies in white, pink or powder blue at the very time of their lives when they are the most messy. Some of the worst things for staining are the very foods and drinks that children love—raspberry ripple ice cream, Ribena, Heinz tomato soup, ketchup and orange juice all make marks that are hellishly difficult to get out. So encourage them to wear bibs at meal times or, if that is infra dig, insist they tuck a huge napkin in the neck of their clothes and have another at the ready on their laps. When my daughter was small I used to make a lot of her clothes, and I always bought an extra length of material which I made into a kind of sandwich-board front. This I backed with clear plastic to

stop stains soaking through, and it could be whipped off in a minute if I wanted her to look pristine. Plastic by itself just acts as a chute for anything liquid, shooting it straight on to your lap.

To save that endless ironing which stares accusingly at you from the corner, try to major on jersey, i.e. knitted materials, as much as you can for children. It has the added advantage of stretchability, especially if it is in a man-made fibre, so that it tends to grow, to some extent, with the child. I once had a dress in a very new man-made fibre (no names, no pack-drill) which was apparently still at an experimental stage. After I'd washed it twice it was down to mid-calf, then it ended up at my ankles. Eventually I cut it up and made a dress for four-year-old Liz—it went on growing and lasted her for years. The kind of tears that come in kids' clothes as a result of rough-and-tumble, are no problem now with the advent of decorative patches. Anything that is torn can be mended by sewing on a Snoopy badge or a Smile at the appropriate place—some of them even come in iron-on form.

If you're shopping for the children, incidentally, and can't take them along with you, do put something that fits well into your shopping basket, for comparison on size. There's a tremendous difference in the fit from one brand name to another; Marks & Spencer are always on the generous side but other things, particularly "pop" ones, can be rather skimpy.

Help, on the home front

Convince the children from the word go that housework/shopping is *fun*—and this means suppressing your grumbles in their presence. Then you can always hope that they'll do some of it for you, wanting to identify with the grown-ups, just as they long to stay up late. (One way out of that late problem, I found, was to let the wretched child stay up late one night when he hasn't got school in the morning, and make the evening as boring as possible with a symphony on the hi-fi or an obscure documentary on the telly; he is then unlikely to ask again.)

Remember, the house belongs to *everybody*, you're not running a hotel, and cheerfully assume that they're going to weigh in. Never ever refuse or scorn an offer of child help. The time will come, later on, when you will do *anything* to get a hand with the washing up. Accept, even if you do have to re-do the bed afterwards. Later on, when they are more useful, be prepared to bribe them shamelessly to co-operate, pay them wages if necessary. When there are several children involved and not enough chores to go round, let them draw lots to see who does what. And if, like me, you can't be bothered to save those Green Shield stamps (which are then left in crumpled heaps in the bottom of bags and baskets, or in drawers) use them to "award" children for work they've done if you don't want to pay them money and give them a book each to stick the stamps in. And on the shopping front, leave those Two-pence-Off coupons in the children's care. They'll have more fun tracking down the bargains in the supermarket than you will. If they're untidy, and uncooperative in general, you can always use the stick instead of the carrot: give each one of them a "float" of, say fifty pence on paper at the beginning of each month, and fine them a couple of pence each time you have to clear up after them. The same system works quite well for swearing. Each child can be given an account book to keep. To avoid the "gimme-gimme" syndrome and the whine for cash, it's a good idea, once they can do their sums, to pay them pocket money monthly rather than weekly, so they learn to balance a budget from an early age.

Switch the house to suit the child

One thing you learn early on in the child-rearing stage is that no way can you adapt children to suit the house; it has to be the other way round, for a few years at least, if you want to keep your sanity and avoid shouting "don't touch" half the day. The one exception to this is the vexed subject of nursery furniture. It's a waste of money because children grow up so fast, are so sophisticated these days, that those Walt Disney decorated mini-cupboards, those dinky chairs and little Noddy wardrobes become obsolete in no time at all. If a child wants a

low chair, it's far better to cut the legs down on an ordinary one from a junk shop and spray it a bright colour. The same chair will come in handy for all sorts of jobs around the house —I use one for shoe-cleaning chores, for instance. And on the bed front, once they have outgrown a cot, buy a full-sized bed. You can be pretty sure, anyway, that it will be used on occasions to house overnight guests (full-sized, that is) and they won't appreciate having to sleep in something the size of a ship's bunk. Bunk beds are sometimes the only answer if you have more children than space, but here again, do buy the largest ones you can find and *do* give the child underneath something to look up at. (Just go and lie down on the bottom bunk, and you'll see what I mean.) If you can't give it a ceiling of hardboard, then roller-blind material of a "sky" with stars and moon on it will cheer the view up no end.

Lino makes the most practical flooring in a child's room, or that soft vinyl cushioned floor. If you're tempted to add rugs, avoid skidding accidents by copydex-ing a strip of foam plastic (from Woolworths) underneath at either end, to hold the mat in place. Fix the children's wardrobes (full-sized one, please) so that they can reach up to hang their clothes up by themselves, right from the word go. The easiest way to do this, especially if you have built-in cupboards, is to fix ladder uprights to the insides of the side walls or at the back—the kind used for adjustable shelving—then concoct a clothes rail fixed on shelf brackets that can be moved up and down as you wish. And do give them shelves for clothes rather than drawers. Drawers can come out and fall on small feet. (But don't forget that a drawer, taken from somewhere else in the house, by the same token, makes a marvellous, impromptu bed for a baby. Put a thick blanket in first to overflow and "pad" the edges.) Avoid, like the plague, rickety, tall, narrow, free-standing wardrobes. I went crashing to the ground, playing houses inside one as a child and, since it fell on its door, I was trapped, in terror and pain for quite a while before my mother twigged where I had got to. There's a current vogue for playing at Dr. Who in wardrobes, so watch this point.

Most child-stains come in muddy or dark colours. I'm

thinking of chocolate, paint or plain dirt. So it pays to choose a darkish colour—tobacco brown is ideal—for doors, stair rails and so on. Use dark bright paint or vivid patterned vinyl on the walls if you want peace of mind, especially those lining a staircase or in a hall.

Stowage of toys is another headache. And on the principle that if you can't beat 'em join 'em, it pays to have a decorative chest or box in every room they go in, brassbound or otherwise, into which discarded toys can be flung, speedily for a quick clear-up. Going round the house looking for their toys will keep them quiet for hours, afterwards, too. If you have a particularly untidy mob, then have a special Lost Property drawer or chest into which you pitch all odds and ends you find around, if you haven't time to restore them to their owners. Think in terms of using cheap assemble-yourself kitchen units in a child's room for stowage; they come in all sorts of non-kitchen colour schemes now. Another solution is to have a "working-top" of laminated, coated wood like Contiplas, of a good width with toy chests that wheel away out of sight underneath. Tea-chests with castors on them are ideal and can be painted, papered or Fablon-ned. Make the working-top at a height that just grazes the tops of the chests and, therefore acts as a lid. String bags make ideal stowage for messy things. A bag hung over the bath will take all the rubber ducks etc. and drain them at the same time. Another bag, taken down on the beach, will shake off all the surplus sand on toys before you get them home. Don't forget, by the way, when you're furnishing for children to have at least one mirror placed at child height in the bathroom to encourage them to be spruce. It's very difficult, when you're small, to wash your face properly, or clean your teeth, unless you can *see* yourself doing it.

Playspace and toys

Children always seem to want to play anywhere but in the place designated for just that. They loathe, on the whole, being stowed away upstairs in a bedroom when everything else is happening on the ground floor. If I'd ever had a house with

nursery space, I'd have designed it right next to the kitchen with a stable-door between, so I could keep an eye on them. The area under the stairs, where there is usually a cupboard can make a good place for children to play if the house is large enough. You can take the door off entirely or replace it with one in clear plastic, but if there is any door at all, make sure it's entirely safe and can't slam shut and trap them inside. A small off-the-peg wooden shed in the garden can also make a good play house for children. Paint it up brightly inside, put in some old furniture and, with luck, they may spend most of their time making a mess out there. For summer use, you can make a marvellous green "cave" in a corner of the garden if you plan ahead: buy a Polygonum Baldshuanicum plant, which is a creeper that grows at least twenty feet in one season, and train it over appropriate vine-eyes on a fence, round a tree, over a bush, to make a natural hide-out.

Toys are always troublesome, and it's always the expensive wind-up ones, the "spectator" toys that become boring first, from a small child's point of view. So consider some of these, instead, to keep the children quiet: any piece of broken equipment—an old gramophone, wind-up type; an old typewriter; a sewing machine (take out the needle); a broken radio, (make it a battery set, or take off the plug). These things can all be picked up for next to nothing in a junk shop, sometimes for nothing at all from a council tip and will keep them quiet for hours. Other good items to choose are broken bits of jewellery, old shoes, old hats, off-cuts of wood and plastic (much more fun than building blocks) and, if you've lots of space, some of it out of sight, consider a clapped-out old car. Remember, an old sheet draped over a piece of washing line, tied between two trees makes a perfectly good tent. Remember too, if your child is going out to play and you want him back on time, to put your kitchen timer into the saddle bag of his trike, in a pocket of his coat and set to "ping" at the time he should head for home.

One thing that all small children *love* to play with is the telephone, and if you don't want the Exchange driven to distraction and if you don't want situations to arise like this—I

spent a frustrating ten minutes talking to an eighteen-month-old the other day, STD, when I was trying to get hold of his mother in a hurry—keep the handset firmly down on the receiver by slipping a wide large rubber band over them both. A small child won't be able to dislodge it, but you can, easily, when you want to make or receive a call. A friend of mine has had to resort to desperate phone measures because he has garrulous teenagers in tow and it's something worth knowing about. Look in the small-ads in the Sunday papers or *Exchange and Mart* and you'll find telephone padlocks on sale which fix the dial so you can't call out, but can get calls in. He locks his and leaves the key in a sealed envelope where they can get it for emergencies—it acts as a deterrent.

A sick child is a problem on two counts: entertainment and contact. It pays to have a handbell in the house to put by his bed so it can ring out when he wants to call you. On the entertainment front, a large pad and a collection of crayons stowed away in a plastic cutlery drawer will keep a child quiet for a time. Add scissors and Sellotape and he can make things like finger puppets; simple cylinders of paper, Sellotaped into a round to fit over the tops of fingers, with faces drawn on. Those are good even for a child who is so sick he can't sit up. Otherwise a good jigsaw puzzle on a *large* tray makes an emergency toy. And this is the time, when you're embarking on that fearful chicken-pox–measles–mumps era, to consider buying a second, portable telly.

I'd prefer to dose an animal with medicine, any day, rather than a child, but if you give Junior a spoonful of ice cream a second or so *before* you give him his medicine, instead of afterwards, as a reward, his taste buds are temporarily stunned and he won't notice how nasty it is. Alternatively, especially if he's being dosed on a long-term basis, do check with the doctor to see if you can't have the same medicine in pill form. Ground to a powder (crush tablets with the back of a spoon in a saucer) it can be sneaked into sandwiches disguised in jam, peanut butter or pickles. Above all, make sure that the medicine is kept out of the way of enquiring fingers at toddler stage. Having rushed my daughter to hospital after she took an overdose of

Junior Aspirin because she liked the pretty colour, I write with feeling. Being wise after the event, I'd advise buying a set of pram bells, slipping one on elastic around the necks of any suspect bottles that might be left around. At least, that way, you should be able to *hear* that someone's at the bottle again—come to think of it, you could adopt the same measures with the au pair girl, and your gin!

What makes a home more difficult to run than an office—and I've done both in my time, sometimes simultaneously—is that in a house you can expect the unexpected all the time. Children fall ill and are home from school the day you'd planned to go

to town, the boiler breaks down, the washing machine floods. People turn up, or don't turn up—workmen almost never. And if you're really busy, something quite simple like the vicar calling can ruin a whistle-stop day. But it still pays, if you're a full-time housewife to think of running your home in business terms, even more so if you're holding down a job as well, when you've got to be even quicker on the draw. You can't legislate for the odd happening, but you *can* do a lot to make things run more smoothly by a little organisation. Sometimes the simplest things make life better immediately—my whole life-style took a turn for the better, the day I tied the dialling code handbook to the phone on a piece of string!

Having spent almost all of my married life coping with an outside job as well, the first thing I'd say is be prepared to compromise. Don't aim too high or you'll fall short and be full of feelings of guilt. Accept the fact that other housewives will feel superior to you because they have time to clean their silver, that people in the office will be just waiting to imply that you're too pre-occupied with your family to do your job well. But it *can* be done—at a price, and it's a price you'll have to pay: like never having a relaxing lunch hour because you've family shopping to do, like rushing home to cook a meal instead of staying on for the office party, like making any excuse but the truth when one of your children falls ill, and you can't get in to work.

Back home, however conscientious you are, your children will get at you with their own particular brand of blackmail. "You've never been a *real* mother to me," is a favourite one which is switched to "You don't really *understand* me," if you're there all the time, fawning over them and making cakes. Just be prepared to accept rule number one: Mother can never win out, whichever way she plays the game. Children have a great knack of cashing in on those What-is-a-Mum, telly advertisments to make you feel inferior, and are the first to say what a boring old lady you are, if you build your life entirely around them. That being so, there is still a lot of fun to be had —so they tell me—in being a mother. It's convincing yourself of this fact that takes the time!

Shopping

Having a house that as near as dammit runs itself, and a constant supply of food on tap, makes all the difference in the world to any mother with a busy life. Shopping, in particular, is more time-consuming than anything else I know, unless you are one of those cranks who actually *enjoys* going from one supermarket to another, buying loss-leaders. It's especially annoying if you have to keep nipping out for things you've forgotten, so it pays to keep the whole "marketing area" as an ad-man would call it, well under control.

If, like me, you think routine shopping is something to be got over fast, arm yourself with a master list to consult each time you stock up with supplies—better still type one out and get it duplicated so you can simply take your master sheet each week and tick off what you need to get. Everyone has their own particular idea of what "basic groceries" are and if you don't believe me, just peer in the other carts next time you're in a supermarket. Last time I queued at the check-out (something else I try to avoid like the plague) the woman in front of me had a cart almost full to the brim with tins of cat food, the woman behind was majoring on biscuits. Build up your master list by monitoring what you buy over a period of time: when you come back from your next big shopping expedition, get one of the children to write each item down as you put it away. It will almost certainly differ from the list you went out with.

Use your master list as a mind-jerker when you're sorting out what shopping you need; encourage the family to note shortages as they occur, in a notebook on a bulletin board—they'll certainly notice if the ketchup is running out—or, if you've plain kitchen tiles, use them as an instant notepad, you can usually write on them with a felt tip pen, and they wipe clean immediately.

Some people like to work out a week's menus in advance, but I lead such a disjointed life that I find it better to get in a week's basic food, which I can cook the way the mood takes me and according to who is in, or out. Mince, for instance, equals moussaka or shepherd's pie or chili con carne or stuffed marrow, according to what kind of clientele I have, nursery or grown-up.

Chicken pieces can be curried, cooked in sour cream or done Maryland style. As long as you've got the basic ingredients there, you can switch around according to your fancy, and according to the weather, too.

One thing to avoid, above all, is that terrible Saturday-morning scrum down at the shops; we all seem to end up, lemming-like, this way. And that's where bulk buying can be a blessing. If you can have a foray to a farm, to an out of town cash-and-carry, once a month to get in mass supplies, you can cut that Saturday morning shop to a minimum. Some people go a bundle on bulk buying, It's certainly marvellous when you buy things in multiples, but I'm not so sure about those king-size cartons. I find that if I buy a huge packet of something, I dole out huge portions to match. Those giant containers are not necessarily cheaper than several small packets, either, so do a quick price check. If you're not saving money by buying large, then several small cartons are easier to stack and make you less of a wild spender with the contents. Detergent, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper—these are obvious items to keep back-up supplies of, plus staple items like sugar and tea. It pays to keep check, over say a month, on exactly how much of everything you use, so you can forecast accurately what you need to get in the future. If there's a bulk-buy cash-and-carry where things come at wholesale prices but you have to buy wholesale quantities, consider joining forces with a neighbour to keep prices down for both of you.

Many people like to buy meat for the freezer from out of town farms; some swear by it, some swear *at* the idea after they've tried it out. It certainly saves time spent at the butchers, but buying a side of beef has its drawbacks, unless you happen to be a large family with an indiscriminate appetite, en masse, plus a few handy guard dogs to feed. Buying an animal that way means you get quantities of bones and other oddments with your meat, plus cuts like brisket which are not, perhaps, to everyone's taste. But if you're clever with cooking, if your family like almost everything and you make lots of stocks and soups, then buying a half or quarter animal may well be a life-saver. Check out the prices, though; it's not always cheaper,

and the same goes for food sold at freezer centres. It's convenient, but not necessarily cheaper, to buy a pack with fifty lamb chops in it, so watch the price tags. Here again, if the price works out the same per pound, it's better to get several small packets of frozen peas instead of one giant one which has to be hacked into segments with a hammer. Freezer centres, incidentally, now stock really large versions of things like Marmite, ketchup, mustard, things that are in permanent use.

Getting organised

I'm a great believer in making lists in order to keep as organised as possible. I'd never go to bed, for instance, without a notepad and pencil on the table beside me, for those moments in the early hours when you remember something to be done the next day. Don't just make lists of things to do or buy, make lists of the foods that your family will *all* eat, lists of jobs that need doing on the repair front, lists of decoration improvements you hope to make. Take cuttings from newspapers, magazines too, of ideas that attract you, to be stowed away for some day when you have time to do something about them, recipes, perhaps, garden ideas. If you haven't time to stick them into a book—and who has—put them in a loose-leaf folder, just as they are, or in large brown envelopes labelled accordingly, or simply loose in a drawer if you've the space to spare.

Keep a list of repair firms' phone numbers in the kitchen, ready for that moment when the washing machine packs up, or the fridge gives out. Better still, tape each individual phone number somewhere on the machine in question, so that it is really right to hand. Emergency numbers like the doctor, grannie, the dentist and so on, should be taped to the bottom of the telephone so that anyone and everyone can find them in a minute—telephone books always seem to get lost. Alternatively, it pays to have a bulletin board of some sort with vital numbers listed in one corner—it's particularly important if you're dependant on baby sitters or au pairs who are not noticeably intelligent about coping in an emergency.

Treat yourself to a portable metal file case, the kind you can get in office stationers. Not only does it make you feel that

you're in business, but it enables you to lay your hands on documents like the TV licence, car log book or birth certificates, in a moment without having to rummage through a deed box or drawer. You'll need an address book as well, but don't use it just for friends, foes and relatives, list in it more mundane things like the locksmith, the man who mended that broken window so quickly and the plumber. Don't put them in under their proper names, but under their jobs. Mr. Smith may be your nearest and dearest friend right now, when he's laying the lino tiles, but come summer, you can bet your bottom dollar you'll have forgotten his surname.

Plunder the office stationers, too, for one of those superb at-a-glance wall calendars, the ones that lay out a whole month, a quarter, even a year at once. And one evening, when you're feeling bored, mark on it *everything*: the date the car needs its MOT, the licence needs renewing, dentist's check-up dates, birthdays you always forget, and buy some of those little stick-on red arrows and stick them on the wall calendar a week before each event, to remind you to do what has to be done in time.

If you want to be *really* organised, sit down once a month and write post-dated cheques for regular payments, fill out birthday cards and so on. Do it all at one sitting, seal the envelopes, then mark in the top right-hand corner the date when the letter is to be mailed. There are days when you *feel* like doing things like that; choose one of those and get it all done in one painless session. You can even organise yourself on holiday if you're planning to send lots of cards to friends, by writing out their addresses on a sheet of gummed paper labels before you go. That way you've a double reminder to buy the cards and you don't need to cart an address book around. I hope however, you are not like a woman I met in Bangkok who was busy mailing *fifty* cards back home to the States at one time.

Household help

Good household help—if you can get it—is worth its weight in gold, and it often pays to pay over the going rate for a really good char to come in, than a cheap one. Really good domestic help will do things faster anyway, so you can hire her for fewer

hours at a time. Analyse what you need and how best to get it. If you've small children in tow you may be stuck on the mother's help/au pair girl market. I've had thirty au pair girls in my time, ranging from one (a Swedish film director's daughter) who stayed just twenty-four hours and another gorgeous Dane who stuck with us for two years—and I've a wrinkle on my face for each one of them. Scandinavians seem to suit, Germans are good if you don't mind fighting World War Two all over again, but I've always found French girls, unless they come from the provinces, deafeningly sophisticated and unwilling. One I had, who claimed she was descended from the last of the Hapsburgs, expected me to bring her breakfast in bed, another used to call me up each morning to help her choose just which of the twenty-four dresses hanging in her wardrobe she should wear that day. Italians are marvellous with babies but frightened of the dark and of spiders, and they never seem to quite get to grips with the language, so don't let them near a telephone. It's a good rule with all au pairs, actually, to ask them to tell the caller to ring back later, if they're on telephone duty. There is nothing more infuriatingly frustrating than to be given a message to call someone urgently, and *half* a number to go with it.

Au pairs, let it be said, usually have a rough time of it. It's no joke living cheek by jowl with a family, all round the clock. And it's vital that they should have a room of their own that is large enough for them to sit in, as well as just sleep. It could be that you could arrange a swap-around with one of the children if the spare room is near cupboard-sized—a toddler doesn't mind. I wouldn't dream of taking on an au pair girl again unless I could give her her own television set, otherwise you'll see your favourite documentary receding into the background when you haven't the heart to ask her to switch over and she's engrossed in an old film. I had a German girl once who was hooked on Dracula (she pronounced it Dra*coooola*) and who used to come back from the cinema and take an hour and a half recounting every minute detail of the horror film she'd just seen. And that brings me to conversation. Remember that they're here to learn English, despite your darker inner

thoughts as the boyfriends call thick and fast, and unless you're prepared to *talk* to them, you shouldn't take them on.

I cooled off au pair girls eventually and discovered grannies instead. I don't think there's an organisation called rent-a-grannie, but there certainly ought to be, for it's a very happy two-way arrangement if you can find an OAP who wants to earn some pin-money, and have a child who wants somebody comforting, *who speaks English*, to look after them. It's certainly worthwhile contacting your local Darby and Joan club or Citizens' Advice Bureau to see if there are any takers. Grannies will baby-sit cheerfully (though they don't fancy staying up late, so you ought to put them up for the night) and are available during the day. Children, on the whole, like grannies better than au pair girls (though mine were terrified of one, who had whiskers on her chin) and the OAPs, living alone as they so often do, enjoy the company of children and seem to have much more patience than mum. And if you don't have help, try sharing your children—one day you have six toddlers, the next day a neighbour takes them on—it's less tiring than doing a regular stint at a playgroup, and children, en masse, do seem to entertain each other.

If you don't want a regular char, but you do want some help in the house, try advertising in the local paper for someone to do the thing you hate most. There are, believe it or not, people who are willing to do washing, ironing, even sock-darning for money. There are also people who will walk the dog, feed small children or garden at a price. A number of women, incidentally, are taking up gardening now for pin-money, preferring to be out of the house than in it.

Don't get stuck on that cabbage syndrome. Nothing annoys me more than to hear someone say she's "just a housewife"; if you can organise the house to suit you, you can really start living. Even doing the chores need not be entirely non-productive if you switch over to Radio Four instead of listening to pop music or invest in some language-learning tapes and play them over and over again while you're working around the house. I know someone who learnt Russian that way; it seems to work subliminally.

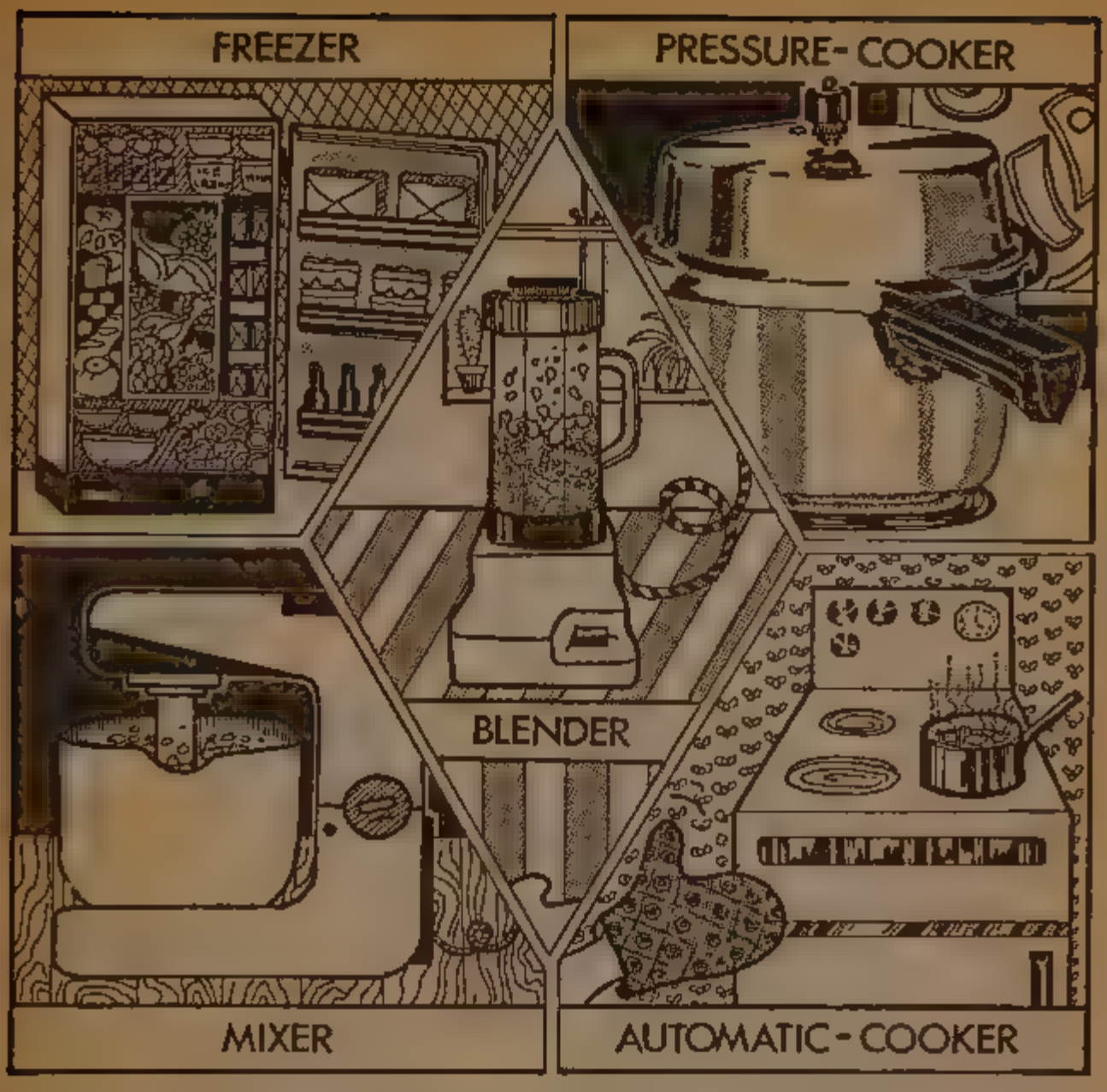
Don't try to compete with the super-wives, keep your head above water, and capitalise on what you can do well, forget the rest, don't struggle to make cakes if you're really a casserole person, buy the buns instead and concentrate on super savoury ragoûts when you feel like a cook-in.

Swing the day to suit *you*; you could call it cheating but I call it common sense. If you're an early riser, then capitalise on it, get up really early and get some of the housework done or the cooking, before the mob come down for breakfast. That way you can slow down in the evening. If you hate getting up, on the other hand, then try and con your husband into rousing the rest of them. Get breakfast organised as much as you can the night before—refer to my remarks about using an automatic oven to cook eggs and bacon, for instance, and do real porridge over night. Then, when you're feeling perkier, even if it is late at night, you can get the rest of the housework done. Remember, you're in charge on the domestic front, so you make the rules.

Don't feel that because you're doing housework you necessarily have to get housework hands—or feet. School yourself to wear rubber gloves—thin or thick, whichever feels better on your hands—not just for the washing up but for general chores, too. They will stop your hands from getting stained, and even jobs like emptying the rubbish containers, especially the dust bag of the vacuum cleaner, tend to make your fingers ingrained with grime. Use your rubber gloves as a beauty treatment too, their Turkish bath effect on your hands is twice as effective if you smooth on a little hand cream first.

Doing the house without *looking* as though you're doing the house is quite an art. I always remember the story Jean Michelmore told me about the day she decided to clean out the cellar, and answered the door to two unexpected autograph hunters, wearing overalls, her head swathed in a scarf. Fortunately they didn't recognise her and asked when Jean Michelmore would be in! Unless you're doing a really filthy job, or decorating, don't wear your oldest dingiest clothes for housework. It pays to have a purpose-bought pair of jeans and a clutch of sweat-shirts for the job; it makes you feel brighter.

You'll feel better if you're slimmer too—try glueing a picture of a fat lady on the door of the fridge—it usually works well as a deterrent. Failing that, try dieting with a friend on an Alcoholics Anonymous style method. If you feel tempted to eat something, ring her and get her to talk you out of it and she can do the same for you. Try having a selection of non-calory crudites, as the French call them; pieces of celery, carrot and spring onion ready prepared to munch when hunger pangs strike and drink lots of water; it makes your stomach feel distended and you're less likely to want to eat.



◇ HELP FOR THE ◇ HARASSED COOK

Most of us have a love–hate relationship with cooking, if we're honest about it. Knocking up delicious little meals to amaze and impress your friends is one thing, but the day-to-day grind of nursery-style grub, that what-on-earth-can-we-have-to-eat-today feeling, makes even the most enthusiastic cook less than happy. Worst of all is that familiar family scene where one

child hates baked beans and the other clamours for them, one person wants to eat early because they're going out, another won't be in until late. Sometimes I wonder whether it wouldn't be better to simply give in and run a cafeteria.

It was the night when I realised I'd contracted to cook *four* totally different meals at four different times (I was treating myself to what *I* wanted too) and one child announced she was going vegetarian, that I thought the time had come to call a halt and organise it in some way. There's a lot you can do, fortunately, to put some of the fun back in cooking and cut out the hassle, but first I reckon you need to have five friends: a freezer, a blender/liquidiser, a pressure cooker, a hand mixer or balloon whisk and an automatic oven. Then you're in business, here's why:

A girl's best friend is her freezer

Buy yourself a freezer, or share some space in one with a neighbour, and you can put some of the fun back into cooking again. I'm not thinking in terms of maniac sessions, either, blanching your own home-grown vegetables—that's not for cheats, it saves money but certainly takes up time. I'm thinking of the sheer convenience of being able to halt meals at any stage you like, and leave them in a state of suspended animation until you want them. I have, currently in my freezer (which also hosts food for two friends) a half-made lemon meringue pie. I started to make it for a dinner party. I did the pastry shell and I got the lemon juice ready. Then I became bored with the whole idea of finishing it, so I froze it, just like that. I froze the pastry shell complete with its flan tin, then, when it was rock hard, I tipped it out and stowed it in a plastic bag. The lemon juice I froze in a cup, and then decanted into a bag the same way. One day, when I summon up the energy, I shall take it out and finish cooking it, but not yet. Meanwhile, it's quite safe, marking time.

The other thing I have in my freezer is a whole selection of meals-for-one. Some of them are left-overs when I've cooked too much shepherd's pie, or one of the family hadn't turned up for a meal. Others are purpose-cooked for just those sessions

when one child wants one thing, another something else. I do at least two portions at a time, and freeze the spare . . . and in our house we even have to have two *different* sauces for spaghetti. The freezer is marvellous, too, for providing a bountiful selection of cake for Sunday tea. You simply wrap and freeze the last wedge of a cake, each time, until you've collected enough to make a plateful. My freezer also houses opened tins that have still got half the contents left in them, and an ice-cube tray full of strong black coffee for flavouring or iced coffee on tap. And pâté freezes like a dream and goes further if you cut it into one-meal portions first.

Owning a freezer allows you to be a moody cook. When you feel like having a baking session—and it doesn't come over us *all* that often—you can do double quantities or more, and freeze the pastry either as "blind" flans, in dough form or finished, ready to warm through, with the contents inside. The experts say that you can't freeze rice, but I do, in meal-size portions. (I find it much easier to cook rice in bulk anyway, than in small quantities.) I allow it to cook, bag it in the deep freeze, then when I want to use it, I simply tip it into a pan of boiling salted water and bring it back to the boil again—perfect.

One of the greatest successes on the freezing front is bread. You can buy it monthly in a great bonanza, if you've got the space in your freezer: French loaves, wholemeal loaves, sliced loaves and rolls, and you can cut them up first into portions for a day, so that they're always fresh. If space is limited, do be sure to have at least one loaf on tap, cut into quarters, for that day when you don't make it to the baker on time.

Pasta mixes, like lasagne or spaghetti can be cooked in bulk and frozen complete with their sauce. Leave them slightly under, rather than over done. You can put them, *in toto*, in the oven to warm through or if the pasta is separate give it the same treatment as for rice—put it in a pan of boiling water. Never freeze pasta, or rice, for that matter, in a huge bag, but always in amounts you'll need at one go, otherwise you'll find yourself as I once did, attacking the thing dementedly with a hammer to try and break off a piece.

Fiddly things like croutons for soup, garnishes for gazpacho

can be frozen; fresh herbs too for show-off cooking out of season. Meat-balls freeze well too. Have separate sauces frozen to go with them; curry, tomato or barbecue, for instance. Food from the Chinese or Indian take-away (it could be left-overs) will freeze beautifully in the foil tins in which they are sold, and do treat yourself to a bag of frozen (uncooked) chips for days when you can't face scraping another potato.

Do you have sandwich-eaters in the house? The most boring task imaginable is that nightly business of making up sandwiches for work the next day, or the rush at breakfast time to get them done. Not any more, with a freezer. You can cheat and do the whole week's supply on Sunday, wrapped and labelled for each day of the week, and get them out at breakfast time knowing they'll have thawed out in time for lunch. Scones and biscuits are a deep-freeze success: make them up, roll them out and freeze each one separately on a tray, then put them together in a bag. Thaw them out, cook them for around ten minutes in the oven and hey presto you've an instant tea. I'm currently in the process of freezing a whole wedding breakfast. The bride wants to do most of the cooking herself but she doesn't want to end up at the altar worn out from an all-night cook-in so we're doing it now, a month before, including the cake!

Pancakes are another useful item that can be cooked and frozen for sudden meals. Make a habit of doing a few extra when you cook a batch, store them between leaves of grease-proof paper in a plastic bag. You can then thaw them out quickly and serve them with lemon, or stuff them, roll them up and heat them through in the oven for a savoury meal. I also major on fruit-pie fillings made from left-over things like stewed rhubarb, apple and so on. I try unusual mixtures like pear with raspberry, orange with the rhubarb, sometimes mixing in a batch of tinned fruit as well, and freeze it in pie-size portions.

I find a freezer so invaluable that, if I had the choice I'd go for a smallish fridge and a larger deep freeze because now that food prices are escalating, apparently on a permanent basis, anything you can buy ahead and store will save you money. On

the cold storage front, few people make the best use of their fridge anyway because they store things in it on the wrong shelves. Fresh meat and fish, milk, cream and cream cheese should all be in the coolest part. (Wrap all dairy products because they pick up smells from other things; wrap all meat because otherwise it will get a hard skin on it.) Butter, eggs and hard cheese should be on the second shelf down or in the door, to avoid getting too cold. All those oddments like left-over cooked food and opened tins should go in the centre of the fridge with fruits and salad vegetables down below. Things tend to dry out in a fridge and cheats can use this to their advantage at times. If I've got some rather soggy rice in hand, for instance, I know that by storing it uncovered in the fridge for a day or two, it will dry out a little and taste better.

Liquidise your troubles away

Next in line for the harassed cook comes a liquidiser or blender which will speed things up no end in the kitchen. Its whirring blades will turn granulated sugar into castor sugar in seconds on those occasions when you need some in a hurry and can't get out to the grocer's (add a dot of cochineal and you'll have coloured coffee sugar too). Lentils, split peas or rice can be ground into a flour to add to soups and stews and thicken them quickly and tastily. A liquidiser will chop your dried fruit for you, grind your coffee beans, split nuts, break up pieces of chocolate for cooking, even shred ice if you break it up first, a little, with a hammer.

Left-overs of meat, fish, cheese or bacon put into a liquidiser with a tiny amount of stock and a dab of butter become sandwich spreads; it makes marvellous mayonnaise without tears and instant garlic butter too: one clove and four ounces of softened butter does the trick, add chutney, tomato paste or mayonnaise and you have a different kind of spread.

But what I bless the blender for, more than anything else, is a quick no-stir, no fuss, white sauce. You simply throw the ingredients in (soften the fat slightly first), give them a whirl, then bring them to the boil. Add some diced lumps of cheese and you've the quickest cheese sauce in the business. Bread

sauce takes only seconds too. Put some hot milk into the blender, add torn slices of bread (complete with crusts if you don't mind a slightly speckly look), onion or what you will, blend, leave to swell, then cook. Things like sweet-and-sour sauce are made in an instant too: put in all the items except chopped pineapple, and Bob's your uncle.

Another thing the blender will do beautifully is make cream soups: any left-over vegetables, together with stock, a little milk, some seasoning, and you've a home-made soup in minutes and you can add chicken scraps from the fridge. I use my blender as well for making chicken-liver pâté. I put in the livers when they are still slightly frozen; that way they're easier to handle. Together with the blender comes another great labour saver, especially for cheats:

Work under pressure—and like it

Too many people are afraid of pressure cookers, they think they're an invention of the devil, but any cook who is short of time (either because she's lazy and hasn't got herself organised, or because she's trying to do a full-time job too) will find she can cheat the clock beautifully with one. After all, how else could you get together a casserole in twenty minutes or make soup in ten? What you're doing, basically, is cooking food at a much higher temperature than normal, and the only time you'll get gravy or fruit juice squirting up to the ceiling is if you attempt to open up the valve before the cooker has had time to calm down. When it has stopped all that sulky hissing, then it's an easy matter to lift the weight or flip up the flipper to test whether it has de-pressurised. Anything that is timed in minutes, things like fruit and vegetables for instance, should be quickly de-pressurised. Simply put the cooker, lid still on, under a running cold tap otherwise they'll continue to cook but meat must be allowed to cool down at its own pace or it will go tough. A pressure cooker is marvellous for soups. Some roughly chopped onions or leeks, some peeled potatoes sweated in butter or dripping, well seasoned, then pressure cooked for ten minutes with a little water, thrown in the liquidiser with top of milk mixed in, makes a marvellous,

filling, dirt-cheap soup in about ten minutes. The carcase of the Sunday chicken, pressure cooked again with a chicken stock cube, then brought back to pressure for a minute or two with noodles added, makes another. And it clips the time off making things like marmalade. You simply put whole oranges in it and cook them, then slice them up with a knife and fork when they are cooked as soft as butter or pull off the rinds and cut them up with scissors—easy. Invest in a pressure cooker if you haven't already got one, make the most of it. It's one of the best ways to cheat at cooking that I know.

Mixing it

Another vital item in the kitchen is an electric hand-mixer—the kind you can use in a saucepan, on the stove or, if you can't raise the cash, a simple old-fashioned balloon whisk, the kind that classic cooks use. A mixer or whisk will get you out of trouble. It will cope with anything that has curdled, if you use it vigorously enough. More important, it will get the lumps out of any sauce that has gone wrong, without all that bother of sieving it. An electric mixer will "rub in" fat for pastry making, but don't get too enthusiastic; if you over-mix, the result will be leathery. If you're using a mixer for pastry, use less fat to flour—six ounces to one pound flour is quite enough—and remember, if the mix starts to "climb" up the sides of the bowl, you're using the machine at too high a speed. Using an electric mixer, you can usually tip in all the dry ingredients together, but take my advice, and put a clean tea-towel over the top if the bowl looks full, when you first switch on, if you want to avoid a floury face.

Doing it automatically

An automatic timer on your oven is a real help if you learn to use it intelligently. It's great to spend an evening at the cinema or the theatre knowing that a hot supper is cooking for you. It can, on the other hand, be one of life's greatest let-downs. I was once invited to a gala lunch by a girlfriend, cooked automatically. The trouble was, when she came to serve up, that she'd

left the cooker switched off at the mains—ah, well, sandwiches . . . If you're out at work and can get yourself organised, an automatic cooker will cope with your evening meal provided you are prepared to major on casseroles and stews. I prefer to use it to help me stay in bed in the morning. You can set it to make porridge slowly the old-fashioned way during the night, or you can put it at No. 400 (Regulo 6), sling some kidneys wrapped in foil, some sausages and tomatoes all in the same dish, into a cold oven, then set it to cook for thirty minutes for a serve-yourself breakfast—great on Sundays.

What else do you need to help you cheat on kitchen chores? A pinger timer for one thing. It will remind you that you've got something coming to fruition in the oven, when your mind is on something else and you've gone off to do other things (carry it in your pocket, don't leave it back in the kitchen, out of earshot). A friend of mine takes hers shopping with her too, to remind her when the meter time is running out on her car. It's a good mind-jogger as well, to tell you when it's time to leave to pick up the kids from school, or down tools and tart yourself up because someone is due to call.

A garlic press is another essential item if you go a bundle for that particular herb, there's no other way that you can add a *subtle* touch to your cooking. A final item I'd pick as indispensable is, surprisingly, a potato peeler, but not just for its normal use. It will slice wafer-thin strips of rock-hard butter, if you've forgotten to take it out of the freezer and you're in a hurry to spread it on bread; the thin slivers will defrost immediately. It also turns the aforesaid butter into credible butter curls for the table, if you go in for that kind of nicety. It will turn hard blocks of chocolate into "ringlets" to go on top of a cake, or shave it finely ready to melt down fast for a sauce, and it will do the same thing for hard cheese if you're going frantic and want to make up a quick Welsh rarebit or cheese sauce.

First-aid foods

There are moments in the kitchen when you have time, and moments when you don't. Legislate for the bad times on occasions when you're slack, organise yourself some "instant"

foods and mixes of your own that will help you out when all is at panic stations. If you haven't got a freezer, for instance, do try to have rubbed-in fat and flour for pastry, ditto for cakes on hand in the fridge for emergency moments. It will keep for at least ten days. Then when you have to whip up a meal your pastry mix will make a fast quiche lorraine. Make a flan case, line it with slices of cheese, top it with beaten egg (two) in milk, sprinkle with crisped bacon (two ounces) and bake. You can make an emergency mix for rolls too. Sift one pound of plain flour with eight teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one teaspoon of salt, rub in one ounce of butter, then store. When the time comes to cook, set the oven at No. 400 (Regulo 6), mix in one pint of milk, put your dough on a floured board and cut into eight portions, brush with egg or milk and cook for fifteen minutes.

Concede defeat if you can't make cakes—and I always maintain that people are either savoury or sweet cooks at heart—and have a selection of cake mixes at the ready; a classic sponge mix, baked in a ring tin, doused with sherry and filled with fruit and cream makes a marvellous showy pudding. Try it with the classic summer-pudding fruits—blackberries and red currants, for instance. Save time on white sauce, if you can't make it the blender way, by cooking up a batch of roux, the butter and flour mix, then storing it in an ice-cube tray in the freezer. For white sauce you drop one cube into half a pint of hot milk, and you're away.

Breadcrumbs for coating are another item that you frequently find you're without after the shops have closed. Have some instant ones in store. Just plonk any stale slices you have around into a hot oven to dry off and toast, then crush them with a rolling pin, put them in an air-tight jar and store. Use left-over scraps of cheese for emergencies; they can be a mix of Cheddar, Danish blue or what-have-you. Collect the bits (preferably grated) until you have, say half a pound in stock, then melt them into six ounces of milk, stir in half an ounce of butter or margarine. Immediately the mixture "jells" pour it into an air-tight container and store it. It should last at least three weeks in a fridge, almost for ever in a freezer. Use it in a

cheese sauce—just add flour, more milk; spread it on top of toast for a quick rarebit; add it to a couple of eggs for a swift cheese omelette, spoon it over cooked fish or use it over cauliflower.

Meal-makers and meal-stretchers

One of the most spine-chilling phrases I hear myself uttering, from time to time, is a hollow "you will stay for a meal, won't you", when I know that I haven't really got anything in stock to back up that statement. So you've organised something for the family but there's not enough to go round really, what do you do?

Give them a large starter to fill them up so that they don't notice the main course is spread rather thinly. Here is where your frozen pancakes could come in, spread with, say, some chicken scraps chopped up in the blender and heavily seasoned. Or omelettes, larded with onion or cheese, could do the trick. If you've got some soup on the go, you can bulk it out with tinned chick peas, haricot beans or chopped spaghetti flung in for the last twelve minutes, or if you've some cooked rice in stock, try that. As a last resort, cover it with croutons—cubes of fried bread or toast scattered over the top at the last minute. Eke out a salad with tasty hard-boiled eggs.

I keep a staple thing called swoop. It is something halfway between a stew and a soup, and it can become either. Usually it is the remains of a casserole with stock added. Left as it is, it makes an excellent emergency lunch dish in winter, accompanied by garlic bread (probably a stale French loaf freshened up in the oven—sliced almost through, spread with garlic butter, lightly wrapped in tin foil and re-baked). It will also liquidise instantly to make a cream soup—even the rather sparse bits of meat in it will disappear. Or I can bulk it out with tinned beans to make a passable casserole.

To cope with situations of this kind, aim to have a hidden store-cupboard which no one is allowed to go to, on pain of death, for precisely the moment when Junior brings the whole cricket team back with him, or relatives drop in—tins and packets of things you can call on when you're suddenly ex-

pected to whip up a snack meal. Be meticulous about replacing things as you need them. Everyone is likely to have their own list—here's mine:

dried onion flakes (also to use when I'm too tired to chop fresh ones for everyday use)
tinned sweet peppers for exotic Spanish omelettes
long grain rice
tinned tomatoes and tinned mince for instant Bolognaise sauce or chilli con carne
tinned mushrooms for salad, omelettes or sudden breakfasts
tomato paste
tuna fish for salads
instant risotto
sweetcorn for bulking out almost any dish, even a salad
curry paste—Veeraswamys for the most authentic flavour, Lekai if you want that something extra hot and coconut-y —plus tinned steak (the only way you can get away with it is curried) and tinned fruit (if you're really stuck you can serve hard-boiled eggs on rice, covered in curry sauce with tropical fruit in it)
instant potato—you can just get away with it as a supper dish if you add top of milk and butter, plus crisped bits of streaky bacon and plenty of grated cheese, then brown it under the grill, serve with salad.

With plenty of cheese in stock, some stale bread and white wine or cider, you can make a passable fondue in a few minutes. In fact, I keep my hunks of stale bread for just this purpose. In our family we've evolved a poor man's version which is perfectly acceptable, substituting cheddar for the Gruyere and very dry cider for white wine (let's hope the off-licence is still open). Baked beans are another stand-by. Serve them with a salad and they help to make up for the lack of potato, stir them into a cottage pie and they make it go twice as far. I always try to have plenty of plain yoghourt around. Mixed with chopped cucumber it makes Raita, a side dish for a curry, or a useful

item to go with a salad; stirred into a goulash, curry or stew it makes it taste more exotic, go further, and combined with sugar and some tinned or frozen fruit it makes a hasty sweet.

Make it easy on yourself

Who wants to toil over a hot stove when everyone else is watching telly? We don't, so here are some ways to make life easier for yourself in the kitchen.

Mix vinaigrette dressing for salads, avocado pears (if you can still afford them) quickly in a baby's discarded feeding bottle. The markings on the side will give you instant fix on the ingredients and with a teat in place you can shake it easily to mix them up.

Or keep olive oil in one of those little oil cans they give you with sewing machines if you're one of those people who simply douse their salad with olive oil—that way it's more accurate and economical.

Chopping things that discolour easily, like bananas, apple slices? Cover them instantly with a self-cling wrap to keep them from "turning" or douse them with lemon juice.

Fed up with all that oven cleaning? Switch over to the slow cooking method, fill the oven with several different items at one time, put the oven at its lowest, leave them to cook all day or all night and you won't lose money over it and have less spatter to mop up. Milk-pudding type dishes do well this way, so do stewed fruits, pulses, porridge and dried fruits. You'll avoid sticky dishes to clean up, afterwards too.

Write out standard recipes you always use, and always forget (after twenty-odd years, I *still* confuse the proportions for Yorkshire pud. with white sauce) in verbal shorthand on a wall near the cooker.

Not enough eggs to go round in a cake recipe? You can replace one with a tablespoonful of vinegar—don't ask me why, but it works.

Roll out your pastry or dough on waxed paper if you're in a hurry; it stops it sticking, and when you're doing a messy cake-making job, line the floor at your feet with several layers of newspaper first, for a quick clear-up afterwards.

In a hurry to whisk up your egg whites? Add a pinch of salt to them.

Left-over pastry on tap? Roll it out, bake it flat, cut it into squares and top it with jam and cream for a piece of "cake" or plonk it on top of mince instead of potato, or with sugar on top of a dish of stewed fruit.

Use other people to do things for you. Make the butcher bone/cut up the meat and trim it, the fishmonger fillet a plaice.

Stir/beat messy things in bowls in the sink to avoid splashes, peel vegetables etc. straight on to newspaper on the draining board, so all you have to do is wrap the skins up and throw them away. Put things into hot detergent water to soak as you cook if you can't wash up as you go along, to make the final clear-up easier.

And persuade your family to take their meals in on trays and take them out that way too, if they insist on eating in front of the telly.

Use time and motion study. One day, leave out in place the things you've been using like knives, spices and pans, and organise storage space for them right where they are to save time. Keeping root vegetables under the sink, for instance, saves valuable minutes when you want to prepare them.

Invest in a high stool so you can sit down for chores, and have a hook somewhere to hang your transistor radio on. You don't want it cluttering up your working-surface.

Do you always use the kettle, the mixer etc. in one spot? Then shorten the plug lead to a minimum so save having flex trailing in the way.

Invest in a spit-roaster if you can. It saves time as you can roast any item, chicken, pork or what-have-you faster than you can in an oven.

Save washing up if you're having a baking bonanza. Start off with pastry, which should leave the bowl clean, then use it for cakes and puddings. Grate or potato-peel cold hard fats before you rub them in.

Use kitchen paper to swiftly take the fat off the top of soups, stews or curries where it tends to float in puddles; keep on blotting it up.

And if you haven't time to watch the milk, and you're afraid it might boil over, stick a pie funnel in the middle of the saucepan. The milk will go up through it like a whale spout but not over the top.

Happy cooking!

SEE YOU LATER, DECORATOR

A kind of numb horror always overtakes the average cheat when the time comes to move into the house or flat that she's fought so hard to get, against all odds. It's the realisation of all the things that have to be done to make it possible to live in. I've moved ten times during my married life, and been constantly amazed that I've never walked into any place, however much I've coveted it, that you could just go into, and take over and

live in. But then I've never moved into a brand new house or on to an estate, but from the stories I've heard from people who have, the result is the same: things have to be done. Furnished places are even worse, because you don't have a chance to change them radically, but even so there is quite a lot you can do, if you think imaginatively.

When moving into a hideous house with "great potential", or taking over something awful, the most important thing to remember is not to lose your momentum. Make a note of all the things that look horrid to you right away when you move in, then deal with them in some way or other—I say this with deep feeling and great experience—otherwise you'll find, amazingly quickly, that you forget all about the appalling pattern of the wallpaper and learn to live with it, don't notice the fearful state of the carpet, and in no time at all you are ground down into accepting it.

As cheats we can't quite see ourselves stripping down the paintwork with a blow-lamp, getting that satin-like finish, above all getting involved in that terrible process known as "making good" which means, basically, smoothing out bumps, filling in cracks and holes, but we should, nevertheless, be able to create something that gives the *illusion* of a place that is pleasant or, at the worst interesting to live in. Here are a few quick tricks which might help.

Take the walls first. If the wallpaper is basically pleasant but just dirty, there are several ways to clean it up (I'm assuming that it is not vinyl and, therefore, washable). You can try using a moistened piece of bread which often, surprisingly, does the trick, or an ordinary soft rubber, the kind that artists use. If that doesn't work soak a piece of cloth with paraffin, leave it to dry, then rub the wall with that; it usually removes the stain. Wallpaper that is marginally dirty but basically pleasant can be tarted up easily with the aid of posters which used to be considered only for people on the college kick, but which are now so beautiful that they are actually collected and framed. I'm thinking, of course, of the more subtle art nouveau type. If you're stuck for a while with wallpaper that needs help, consider spending a pound or two on posters to cover it up,

fix them in place not with drawing pins which are hell to shove into the wall but with that marvellous invention called, variously Blu-tack and Buddies, a kind of pink or blue plasticine that clings, and keeps lightweight items on the wall.

If you're working on a longer-term basis, uneven or lumpy looking walls can be treated in several ways. You can have them rough-plastered, at vast expense, so it looks as though you are living in a cave, or you can cover them up in some way. For a country cottage look you can't beat fabric. It could be checked gingham, which is probably the cheapest choice, or it could be a dimity fabric of the type produced by Laura Ashley or by Sandersons in some of their Triad range. Either way, this is how you tackle the job (and if you can persuade an artistic friend to do it for you, so much the better). Measure the height of the walls and add a couple of inches for a turn-in top and bottom, then work out how much fabric you need in terms of length and width, just as if you were going to use wallpaper. Buy a large number of spools of double-sided tape (the 3M company market it) and a sharp knife, preferably a Stanley one with a retractable blade. Stick a strip of tape right along the top of one wall, under the picture rail if there is one, then turn the two inches under on each strip of fabric and "hang" it in place, making sure it is plumb straight, then put another strip of double-sided tape on the wall down the side so that it just takes in the edge of the fabric, and smooth it over that. (Pull it taut as you go.) Now put another strip of tape along the wall, just above the skirting board and turn up the fabric and press it in place. It sounds rather complicated, but when you get the hang of it, it is easy—you butt each length of fabric alongside the other, on the tape, just as you would stick wallpaper in place. Another quick trick to cover nasty walls is "tongued and grooved" panelling that comes in huge sheets, about eight feet wide and is in fact veneered. It's not to everyone's taste, and it has to be screwed to battens, but it could be the answer to someone's prayer, faced with a thoroughly nasty wall to cope with (and plasterers are like gold dust). They are known in the trade mainly as panel planks, and are certainly a quick way of changing the look of a room. There

are all sorts of instant finishes too, for people who are wallpaper and paint shy—like imitation "stone" walls that can be stuck in place. Take a look in your local large do-it-yourself centre to see what's available.

Outside improvements

The outside of the house too can be improved instantly with the aid of a little "furniture" according to what you've got, and what sort of image you want to project. You can, for instance buy a complete "Georgian" porch, with pillars, all made out of plastic (it appears to be white-painted wood) in several different sizes—the antithesis of the porch of a friend of mine who has a genuine Georgian house—and has a rather wobbly piece of telegraph pole, painted white, in place of one of the original pillars. Enthusiasts can also tart up a plain cottage with shutters (which certainly make a tremendous difference to small unremarkable windows) which are made from white plastic and stay pristine almost for ever, plus "ranch" fencing which is made the same way and slots together like Lego. I find that window-boxes do a tremendous amount to improve an ugly frontage, or badly shaped windows. If you can't get them on to the sill because of casement openings, try fixing them below, on brackets, so the window swings free above them. A plain 1930s house can be faked up to look like a Victorian cottage very swiftly with shutters, window-boxes and the simple expedient of having the large windows taken out and fitted with glazing bars (I know, I've had it done). Plant a swift-growing creeper like the Polygonum I mentioned for a child's garden shelter and the house will age almost overnight as it climbs around the walls at twenty feet a season.

Indoor Improvements

What can be done indoors to help a truly awful house along? It's worst of all if you are stuck, for some reason or other, with furniture that is not of your taste, too. But all is not lost, even for cheats. We can't see ourselves rubbing down table-tops with glasspaper or tackling them with paint remover to restore them to their old original pine. (Look in the Yellow Pages in

your phone directory if you really want that result; you should find someone who is willing to pickle your furniture in acid for you, and achieve the same result in minutes.) But a really hideous table can be turned into something trendy by simply placing a length of Contiplas over it—white melamine-faced board which you can buy by the foot in several different widths including shelf width. If you want something warmer-looking then buy Contiboard which has a wood-grain finish. The weight of the board will make it stay put, but if you want to, it can be screwed into place from underneath.

An unpleasant, permanently stained carpet that you can't bear to live with, but can't afford to pitch out either, can be given a new lease of life if you stain it in a rich, satisfying colour like cocoa brown. Carpet dyes can be found, with a little determination, and they brush on (I used a scrubbing brush for the job) and dry amazingly quickly and evenly. Failing that, I don't see why you can't use a Dylon cold-water dye in thick solution for the same effect although this is not recommended by the makers. Floors that look horrid but are basically sound can be painted interesting colours—something that no one thinks of doing. Use lino paint for the job, or, better still, a high-quality yacht paint which really gives a tough finish. Try doing a floor in different stripes or, for a really chic finish (no dogs or children please) paint the floor white. Upholstery that is an unpleasant shape or colour or badly stained and uncleanable, can be improved no end by the addition of dozens of cushions in bright colours to hide the contours and the marks. Pile them high and you will give an atmosphere of decadent luxury for surprisingly little. I buy my cushions from East End stalls, for the basic background and front them with expensive ones covered in mirrored Indian fabrics. Miscellaneous, varied and lumpy bits of upholstered furniture which bear no relation to each other can be knitted together surprisingly easily with the aid of stretch loose covers. There are numerous firms who advertise these, some of them in perfectly acceptable tweedy fabrics and good colours, in the small ads at the back of the Sunday papers. Two I would recommend as being able to cover almost

anything are Plumbs Ltd., Salmon Street, Preston PR1 6NY, Lancs; and Greens and Gill Ltd., 16 Sidcup Road, Manchester M23 9PH. Both, of course, deal mainly in mail-order. Ill-matched wooden furniture can be knitted together on the same principle, provided it is not valuable. Take it outside and spray it all the same colour so that all the bits go together—scarlet or white looks best. Use a spray can for a professional finish and give everything several coats. Baths are something else that can often do with a paint job. Buy a special kind of paint for the best finish. Your local DIY centre should be able to help, but don't expect a result up to Ideal Standards. Instead, make your bath look gay: when the paint has dried, add stencilled flowers all over it in a contrasting colour to cover up your brushwork. You will gather that painting baths by hand, like re-spraying cars, is harder to do than it looks at first sight. Spray or paint a hideous old fridge too, to make it interesting. I bought a very efficient but out of date one that looked like an Odeon cinema for just £3, sprayed it white from cream and painted a design on the door—and have since refused offers for it because it looks so amusing in the kitchen.

Have you got hop-along furniture? That's another hazard of rented accommodation, but if you inherit a priceless piece with one leg shorter than the rest, it's a relatively easy matter to put it right. Get some plastic wood, mould it into a lump roughly the size of the gap on the end of the offending leg, put it on the floor on a piece of newspaper, then press the short leg down on to it, and adjust it until the chair or stool or table stands level and firm. Take a kitchen knife, trim off any excess plastic wood that bulges out of the leg shape, then leave it where it is, preferably overnight, to dry thoroughly and harden. Now, if you are a purist, you can rub the peg-leg down to match the rest of the piece with fine sandpaper. There are, incidentally, a number of tables in top Mayfair restaurants I would like to give this treatment to.

Dull or dreary beds can be faked up now to look interesting—remember that one with a classic headboard and baseboard can always be sawn down on top to mattress level, then smoothed off, to turn the bed into a "divan". Rather more

chic is the idea of turning it into a four-poster with the simple addition of spindles which are, basically, the uprights of bannisters which you can buy ready turned into leg-like shapes. For a more solid, medieval look, you could actually buy turned table legs and fix them in each corner of an ordinary bed to make it into something more exotic.

That's probably enough on the first-aid front for any cheat to assimilate, but I would offer two further aids to instant décor: plants, in any shape or form hide a multitude of sins. They add to a cheerful clutter, hide things you don't want people to see, and more than repay their cost in giving the *impression*, at any rate, that your house is well cared for. The other item is a good old-fashioned screen, which should always be on hand for emergencies. It will hide any amount of mess. You can stand it quickly around a work table littered with sewing machine and fabric, you can do the same thing for a table cluttered with homework, and there's a lot to be said, if you're in a desperate rush, for simply flinging all the rubbish into one corner and hiding it with a simple screen, because nobody will dare to touch it for fear that it falls over on them.

If you're moving into a new house, or doing major surgery on yours, it pays to take a long cool look at what you've got before you start doing things, to see if things can't in fact be done better. We're hidebound into thinking in terms of a house with bedrooms upstairs and living/kitchen space downstairs, for instance, but if your house has a fabulous view over the Downs or over the sea, it could be that you should switch things around to make the most of it. Ask yourself, are you really using your house effectively? Might it not be better to sleep downstairs and live up? And if not, could it be that you ought to move the kitchen from the back of the house to the front for a livelier view and a sight of who's coming and when, while the back of the house can then be opened up on to the garden as a natural extension of your living space. And while I'm on the subject of kitchens, is your working-top the right height for you? A tremendous amount of fatigue can be caused by working at a surface that is too high or, even worse, too low for you. In a small kitchen if you find your units are placed too

high, it might pay you to have duck-boarding fitted to the floor to raise it. If the units are too low, you can either raise them on a plinth or simply fit another surface on top—Contiplas would do the trick again, to raise them that vital inch.

Do you really need a dining room? That's another question worth considering if you are hard-up for space or if it is hardly ever used. This could be just the place where the hi-fi and a couple of armchairs could be moved so that you can still use it for meals, but there is somewhere for record addicts to sit without conflicting with TV. Or it might be a good place to use as an office as well, or for homework, and if you had a fold-down table, and a convertible settee in there, it could double as a room for the occasional overnight guest. If you're trying to cram a lot into a small space, by the way, and you're thinking in terms of new furniture, remember that two settees take up less room space than one settee and two free-standing armchairs and they look more attractive too.

Never use your fireplace? Then cheat some extra space out of it. Having the whole chimney wall taken away would probably cost a fortune, but there's nothing to stop you opening it up to turn the chimney breast into a cupboard, or a deep alcove in which the TV set could stand, or you could shelve it and use it for books. TV, record players and other items that take up so much room space can often be found a home in a cupboard (make sure there is plenty of air circulating behind them, though, or they may overheat). The advantage of stowing them away like this is that they are out of sight when they are not needed, but you can simply leave the cupboard door open when you want to use them.

I've already talked about using under the stairs for extra storage. Opened up it could even make an alcove with a single bed in it, and it would certainly make a pleasant place for a bench seat, some cushions and the telephone. But a deep freeze is a bulky item to find a home for, and the garage is not always convenient. Provided it is on castors so you can pull it out to inspect the contents, under the stairs makes a good home for that too. Cadge extra space in places like bedrooms. They double well as sewing rooms or studies, for instance, and you

can always hide the clutter connected with them behind a decorative screen. This works the other way too, incidentally. Pushed back while you're working, it will hide the bed from view. Don't forget space *under* the bed too. It might pay you to lift it a little higher off the floor to accommodate a pull-out drawer fitment. I know someone who keeps her filing system this way in her bedroom/office.

Cut down on labour

When the time comes to contemplate major changes in the house, think in terms of cutting out labour as much as you can. For the least bother and minimum upkeep, choose one similar surface for each floor, for instance. Heavy duty lino for instance, is easy to keep up with just mopping or sweeping and comes in tiled patterns (better than using lino tiles which harbour dirt between the cracks). An all-fitted carpet is easy to keep going too. If you live in an old house, incidentally, with gaps between the skirting board and the floor bringing dust and draughts in their wake, consider taking a fitted carpet up to the skirting board top and fixing it there; it looks very attractive and makes the room warmer and easier to clean provided you've a vacuum cleaner with a hose attachment. The thing to avoid is half and half compromises like a carpet in the centre and wood or lino round the edge. That way you need two sets of tools to do one floor. If it's a two-tone look you're after, you can think in terms of a fitted carpet with a centre in one colour, a border in another, and the same goes for lino, too. If you're laying carpet, especially of course, on the stairs, do allow a foot or two extra when you buy, and tuck it under at the top or at the bottom, so you can move the whole carpet up or down to avoid wear in one spot. It will last at least five times as long that way, and it works well in perfectly rectangular rooms, too.

Stick-on tiles are not just for the floor; there's nothing to stop you using them on the wall instead. Lino tiles, for instance, make a good substitute for ceramic ones in a bathroom and often give you more choice of pattern. Mirror tiles and cork tiles are surprisingly easy to hang. (Six cork tiles, for

instance, stuck on a kitchen wall in a rectangle make a useful bulletin board.) Mirror tiles—and there are some from mirrored lightweight plastic too—placed at right-angles to a window or in an alcove will make any room look larger and lighter immediately, and the lightweight version are very simple for anyone to fix. There are all sorts of tricks for making a room look larger or more of a piece. The lighter the shade and the more one-colour a room is, the larger it will seem to be. The ultimate is the all-white room, floor and all, which looks *huge*. The smaller the pattern of the wallpaper you choose, the larger the room looks too, because it deceives the eye into thinking that the walls are further away than they actually are. (You can pull the same trick in a small garden, incidentally, by majoring on miniature plants and trees.) Use pattern to pull together an awkward-shaped room with ugly built-in cupboards, eaves, sloping ceilings and so on. If you cover the lot—cupboard doors and all—with a chintzy wallpaper and have matching curtains the effect is dramatically better. Wooden chests of drawers or cupboards can be wallpapered perfectly well, by the way. Trim the edges neatly with a razor blade afterwards, then give them a coat—better still two—of clear varnish (vinyl wallpaper won't need this treatment).

If you are bad at decorative ideas and choosing colours, steal from the experts: copy room sets from home magazines, or from the window or furniture department of your local store. Go, above all, to places like Sandersons of Berners Street, W.1, where they have dozens of rooms ready decorated for you, and you can choose the wallpaper ready co-ordinated with fabric and paint, all under one roof. Buy the do-it-yourself magazines not so much for the articles but for the small-ads at the back which have dozens of brand new ideas on sale each month. You can, for instance, buy an off-the-peg copper canopy by mail-order to tart up a dull ordinary fireplace, and side panels or bannisters up the stairs can be replaced with easy to fix, ready made wrought iron, ready coated in white or black paint.

Doors are often a problem, and it pays to spend rather more

than you intended to have a really good-looking front door. You can save money in other ways on other doors. If you have ugly ones around the house, and you want a smooth look, you can buy hardboard panelling already cut to size that can be easily fixed by panel pins on the old door, then painted. If you are re-designing doors, don't forget that with children around the old-fashioned stable door is a good idea and an existing door can often be cut into two for that purpose. A stable door between a kitchen and playroom, for instance, as I've said earlier on, makes it possible for you to cook and keep an eye on the children at the same time, without them running under your feet.

Down to decorate

Let's get down to decorating, and before you start, do remember about hired help. Your local hire shop should be able to give you a hand with a number of items that make life easier: mini-scaffolding, for instance, if you are doing ceilings, a sander to skim a thin coat off a floor and make it look like new (a very messy business this, the house gets filled with sawdust, but the effect is tremendous), and above all, my favourite find, a steamer/stripper which takes wallpaper off in minutes (the only way to tackle this job if you are doing a large room and want to get down to the bare plaster).

If you decide to paint the walls (and never use distemper because if you want to decorate again later, it has to be scraped off; it won't even take wallpaper) you're inevitably stuck with washing them down first with sugar soap. Use a broom for the job (but put lots of newspapers to protect the floor because sugar soap tends to stain in streaks) and start from the bottom of the wall and work up, otherwise drips will run down and leave stripes which are difficult to paint out. I always make a bracelet of foam plastic to put round my wrists when tackling a paint-washing job like this. It stops drips crawling up my arms—try it, you'll find that it works well.

Save time on stirring paint. For a day before you're going to use it have the tin somewhere handy and turn it upside down, then back upright again, every time you pass. You'll

find that way it will be ready-mixed by the time you start work. Another pointer: make a cup of tinfoil or use a discarded foil pie or cake container as a cup around the handle of your paintbrush above where you hold it. It will stop the paint from running back down on to your hand when you've overloaded the brush, and when you are tackling nasty bits like ceilings and high walls. I always wear one of those clear plastic rain bonnets—to hell with my appearance—or a shower cap when I'm painting because I always manage to get paint splatters on my hair otherwise. To keep splattering down to a minimum, it's a good idea to stretch a large rubber band, a piece of elastic or a piece of string across the top of the paint can. You can then wipe off any excess paint from the brush on it, as you pull it out of the paint when you re-load. If you are working on a stepladder, a cup hook screwed into the side of the top step makes a useful place to hang the paint can when you're not using it.

Cheat on having to be neat when you tackle things like window frames. Line the glass alongside the glazing bars with masking tape. That way you can paint fast and slapdash and, once it has dried, just pull the tape away and you'll have a neat edge. Stairs are another dodgy area to paint because they're in constant use. But you can get round it by painting one half of each tread one day and letting them walk up the other side, then switching over the next. As long as you do it carefully, the join in the middle won't show. Painted furniture is a cheap and cheerful way of livening a room up. If it's a fiddly item like a Windsor chair, then use paint in a spray can instead, rather than trying to do each bar separately. If you're painting anything with legs, incidentally, to avoid a mess on the floor, or having to detach newspaper from them afterwards, drive a nail into the bottom of each leg and stand the item on "high heels". It makes the job much easier to do.

Paint rollers make it possible for you to cover large areas of wall in a hurry and are also useful for putting on wallpaper paste quickly and evenly. Don't strip the wall down underneath unless the previous paper is in a very bad condition. It's often quicker for cheats to stick the old paper back in place if

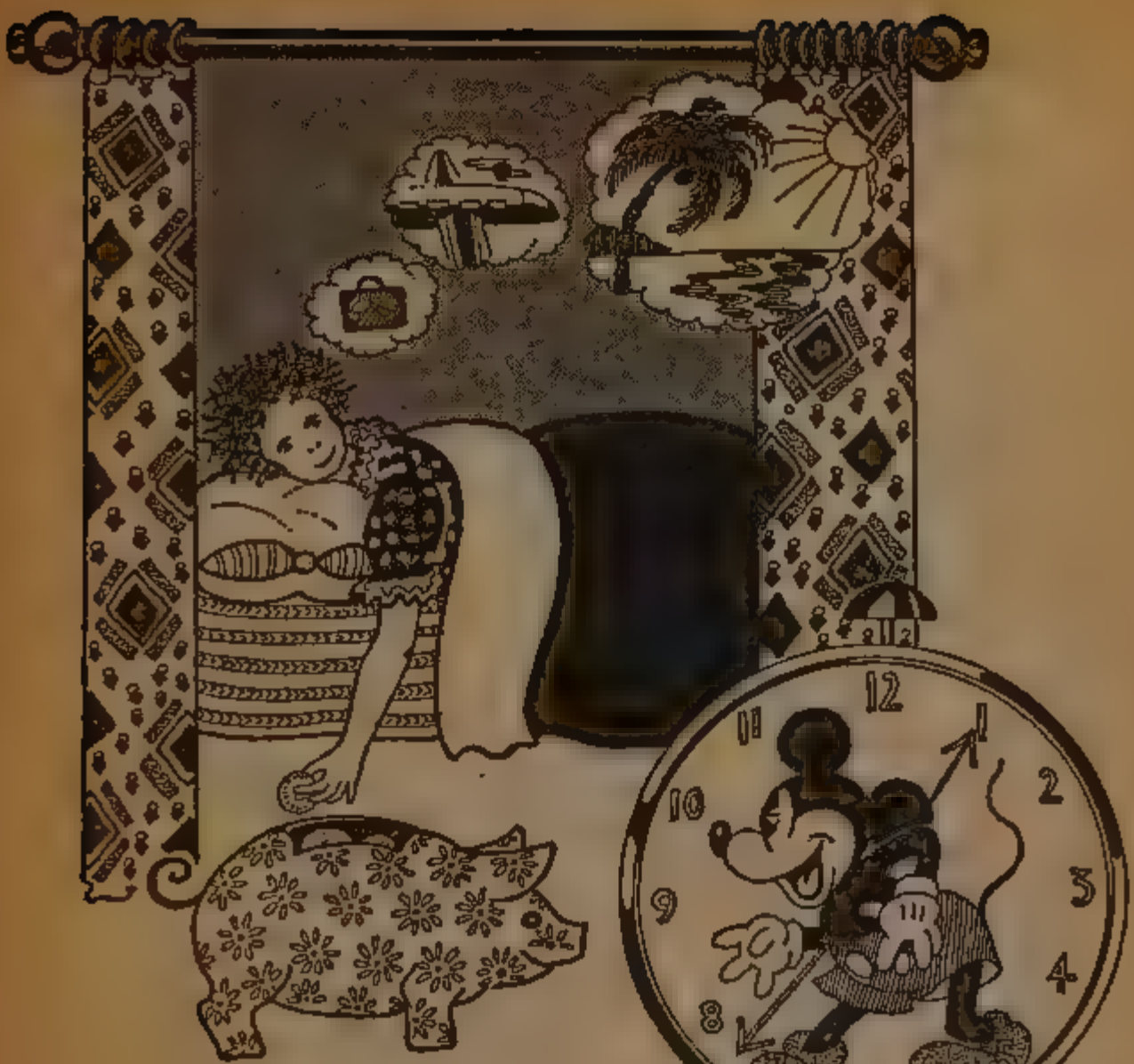
it's lifted a little, but if you've got only a small area to strip, and you don't want to hire a steamer, the best way to tackle it is to soak the paper with a mop in hot water or a paint roller soaked in hot water—some people swear by the addition of a little vinegar. If the paper is a waterproof one, you may find that using a nylon pot scourer to soak it will help—it scratches the surface and allows the water to penetrate more.

Use an easy paste like Polycell for the job. If you get it on the top surface of the paper it won't show. And to save time and trouble, use a portable electric egg-beater, if you have one, to blend the paste for you in a couple of seconds. Take a quick look over the wall before you start, "dust" it down with a broom otherwise the paper may not stick, and if you find any greasy spots—another non-stick area, if you're not careful—varnish them over quickly. Nail lacquer is perfectly adequate for the job; it will seal the grease and stop it oozing through. If you've had to take off shelf fixings, nails for pictures and so on, get a fistful of matchsticks before you start papering, push them into the holes that are left and leave them just *slightly* protruding. You'll find then that when you paper on top you'll be able to locate the holes easily, and the soft matchstick won't tear the wallpaper as you hang it. Then you can pull them out and replace the shelf fixings. If you're unlucky enough to tear a piece of wallpaper or have an accident, provided it's not in a very conspicuous or much-handled position, you can cheat by cutting an uneven patch of the same pattern—say a large flower, from an off-cut and sticking it over the torn place. You must match up the design exactly of course, then the illusion is complete. If you're patching wallpaper, always tear the edges, don't cut them in neat straight lines—it doesn't show nearly as much. Be generous with the paste, press it down well and it shouldn't show at all if there is a fairly lively pattern involved. If you are collecting screws, nails, washers and fiddly things en route, stick them, as you take them off, on to a strip of Sellotape like flies. It saves them rolling off the table.

I find vinyls very easy to work with; they're much more stable than ordinary paper, but Fablon and other instant impact coverings are much more difficult to handle. To avoid

a nervous breakdown when working with Fablon, try putting it in the fridge for at least half an hour before you start, having cut it to the size and shape you need. It makes it far less tacky when you're trying to position it on the final run, and it doesn't affect its performance since it sticks just as well.

Sandpapering is another tricky thing to do. I used to find that I sandpapered pieces off my fingers at the same time, until I made mitts out of the sandpaper with the aid of Sellotape (don't bother with the thumbs). That way I could work with two hands at once, and once one side of the mitt wears smooth, it's a simple matter to turn it over and use the other side. The only snag is that if you are a fast worker you'll find you're hands get very hot inside, so you may have to wear gloves underneath.



TIME AND MONEY SAVERS

Basically, all we cheats want to save time, so we can do something more interesting than running the house. Who, for instance, would spend an afternoon polishing brass when they could be out and about, or even dozing in bed. We want to save money too, so we can spend it on more interesting things than Brillo pads, so I've included some cash-cheating ideas, culled from women, in the main, who make a profession out of being good housewives, and know how to save the pennies.

It's a list to dip into from time to time, when you've an odd minute, of things that might just help make life a little easier.

Back to brasswear, first of all: it's something that should be done only occasionally. Get it as clean as you can—if it is really terrible, you can collect a bunch of stuff and get it professionally done (enquire at your local antique shop). Otherwise try using a paste made from salt and vinegar. Copper comes up well if you rub it with half a lemon. Be sure to have lots of rags on hand, you'll need them. Get the brass or copper as clean and shiny as you can, make sure it's perfectly dry, then give it a coat of clear lacquer. If it's a small item like a door knob or knocker, colourless nail varnish will do. It should stay okay that way for months.

Another item on the antique front—those stoves and fire-screens that the Upstairs–Downstairs servants used to toil over with black lead—don't do them the traditional way. Try using liquid shoe-polish, the kind they sell for children's shoes, instead. It goes on beautifully and buffs up to give a good shine.

Use rubber or plastic gloves, of course, for doing these cleaning chores, and if you find them difficult to get off, remember to shake a little talc into them before you put them on in the first place—you'll find your hands slip in and out easily. Forget to do it? Then hold your gloved hands in a basin of ice-cold water for a minute or two; that should do the trick. Keep the fingers of worn-out rubber gloves, incidentally, to slip over your "working" fingers when you're doing messy vegetable preparation. It saves them from being stained.

One of the bores about trying to live out of doors is having to take everything in when it rains. Take cushions for patio furniture, for instance. But if you make your own, you can get around the problem quite easily. Put the filling first of all in a plastic cover (any normal sewing machine can cope with plastic) and *then* put the cloth cover on top. Then, if they're left out in the rain, they won't get soaked through, only wet on the outside, and they'll dry in a matter of minutes. Use plastic, too—the self-clinging wrap kind—to cover over the saddle seat of a bicycle that has to be stored out of doors, to save

having to wipe it dry. Bikes that have to stay out of doors will benefit, incidentally, by being given a thin coat of Vaseline over them, so they shrug the rain off.

Here are some more time-savers around the house that you may not have heard of, but are certainly ideal for cheats:

* Forget to change the water for cut flowers? Add just a few drops of bleach to the water when you first put them in a vase, and it will keep sweet. Another dodge is to add a piece of charcoal (the kind that you use for a barbecue will do) which has the same effect. Store cut cucumber in water and charcoal too to keep it fresh.

* Save time on that maddening chore of fishing for the end of the Sellotape when it's firmly attached to the reel. Stick a shirt button or anything similar (a half pence will do) under the cut end before you press it back into place—try a matchstick for this job as well.

* Hate cleaning out the bread bin? So do we all. But if you line it—or any drawer that contains "crumby" things—with foil, it's easy to lift out from time to time and replace.

* Got one of those complicated multi-light fittings? If you find you have to change a bulb in it, change the whole lot. The others are bound to go soon, and you can use them up elsewhere, but it saves having to keep on climbing a step-ladder to do it.

* Going out for the evening, in a hurry? Going away on holiday or for the weekend, and you haven't got a dishwasher? Take your last meal on paper plates, plastic cutlery—keep some in stock for emergencies like this—so you can throw away your washing up. I once interviewed a rich and eccentric man, incidentally, who entertained me to lunch at his flat, then threw all the cutlery and china down the rubbish service chute. He said he always did it because he hated washing up and couldn't stand having servants around to do it for him!

* Save time on the kitchen front, if you're having a bake-in. Creaming butter and sugar in a bowl? Push it to one side with a spatula when it's ready, and use the rest of the bowl for doing things like whisking the eggs up. If the fat is too cold to cream properly, by the way, try dipping the whisk into boiling water

for a minute before you use it—the same goes for a metal spoon too.

* Hate cleaning up celery? Try a tip a friend gave me: collect an old toothbrush, boil it to make sure it's clean, then use it for the job. It gets into the grooves beautifully and can be used to clean up rhubarb too.

* Fairy cakes are fiddly to ice. Try this instant method instead: when they're still warm from the oven, either put a dollop of glacé icing on top or, quicker still, some of those bought chocolate buttons. Pop the cakes, still in their tins, back in the oven as it cools and the icing will spread itself.

* New potatoes are a drag to do. If the skins are good-looking enough, save time, don't scrape them. Scrub them thoroughly and cook them as they are. If you must scrape them, save time again by leaving them to soak first of all in water that has a tablespoonful of salt added to it—it softens the skins. Plastic pan scourers make good potato cleaners, incidentally, whether they are old or new.

* More on the potato front. If you do potatoes ready to cook, and leave them in soak overnight, add a spot of milk to the water. It stops them from going slightly mushy on the outside. Change the water before you boil them, next day. Cut down on oven time for those potatoes baked in their jackets. Leave them to soak in boiling water for fifteen minutes before you put them in. To do quick, delicious roast potatoes, boil them first until they are almost done, drain the water off, leave them for a moment, then shake them round in the pan so their outsides become fluffy—then put them to roast round the joint.

* Save time and washing up if you've kippers to cook. Run a skewer through their tails and hang them up in a jug full of boiling water. They will "do" themselves that way, and you won't have a frying pan to clean up afterwards. If you end up with a sinkful of suds, incidentally, something that often happens if you've been over-eager with the detergent, just dip a cake of soap in the water, and they will disappear.

* Save time and effort by cleaning windows this way if, like me, you can't find a window cleaner for love or money. Use a

soft nylon broom dipped in a bucket of hot water (don't use a detergent unless you have to; it tends to dry in a streaky way). Then dry them with the same broom shaken dry and well padded with crumpled newspaper. Newspaper gives the best shine of all to glass and that goes for car windscreens and mirrors as well.

* Cut down on washday blues when it rains, and save drying time, if you haven't got a tumbler machine. Put your drip dries out of doors whatever the weather is like but hang them inside those thin plastic covers that the cleaner sends your clothes back in. They'll drip away happily, despite the rain, and you can bring them indoors when they've stopped, to finish them off. Still use starch when you wash cottons? You'll find you can save ironing time if you add a little salt to the starch water, then damp the clothes down again, this time with hot water just before you iron them.

* Save the water when you de-frost the fridge; use it to fill your steam iron and you'll save time later on—it won't need de-furring.

* Don't waste time trying to mend net curtains—the repairs always show, anyway. Hang the curtains up pulled out straight, "re-arrange" the tear as near to its original state as you can, using a needle for the job, then either spray the area with a really tough hair lacquer or paint it carefully with clear nail varnish. If you wash it carefully you will find it stays put. If the hole is really bad, you can "glue" a patch in place using the same method.

* Enjoy making your own bread? Then try this time-saving way which cuts out half of the work; it is particularly good for wholemeal bread, by the way. Take your usual recipe, mix the yeast, sugar and water in a small basin, the flour and salt in another bowl and get a loaf tin at the ready. Put all three containers into the oven on the lowest possible setting (around Regulo 4) for fifteen minutes, in other words, until the oven has *just* warmed up. Now mix up the yeast and liquid with the flour, knead the dough in the usual way and pop it into the slightly warmed tin. Leave it in the oven, still on the lowest setting, for another threequarters of an hour. Now, simply turn

up the thermostat to No. 400 (Regulo 6)—without peeking—and leave it for forty-five minutes for a fuss-free loaf.

* In a hurry when you're hard-boiling eggs for a salad? The minute you reckon they are done, leave them under a running cold tap until you've time to peel the shells off. That way you stop the yolks from going black in the way they usually do if you don't shell them immediately. Preparing runner beans for a meal? Here's another time-saver—run a potato peeler down their edges to "string" them.

* Save yourself unnecessary walking on the table-laying front, by keeping items that you constantly use, like butter, salt, pepper, perhaps even table-napkins too, right to hand. Don't put them away, store them instead in a large decorative dish in the middle of the table.

* To save that endless, time-wasting searching, have a binge, get several duplicate house keys, car keys and so on, and keep them in a special place in, say the garage. It costs very little and saves a lot of swearing on the day you find you're locked out. Fix a spare car key with tape or magnet on to a convenient spot underneath the car chassis, somewhere else you can get at when the car is locked to save situations like I saw the other day: anguished parents trying to fish an ignition key out of a drain in my local High Street, while the giggling toddler who had dropped it there looked on!

* To save on another time-wasting annoyance—searching for the light switch when you come in when the house is in darkness and the phone is ringing—put a strip of luminous tape on those switches you find difficult to locate in the dark; it's scarcely noticeable by day.

* Do your own sewing? Then here are some time-savers that will especially appeal to cheats. When one of your measuring tapes finally gives out in the middle, stick a short section of it to the side of your sewing machine. It saves time hunting for a tape when you want to do an instant check on things like zipper lengths, hem depths.

* Be organised, keep a concertina file (the cardboard variety you can get at the stationers) with each section labelled, containing tapes, zippers, scissors and so on. When you make

a garment for someone, stick spare buttons, a good length of thread and/or ribbon in an autograph book, notebook or something similar so you can instantly find them. Put patches of the material in too, at the ready. Ribbons, in general, tape too, keeps unsullied and uncreased if you store it in a screw-topped glass jar—it gives you at-a-glance reference too, to see what you've got in stock.

* Making buttonholes in a hurry? Then stop them from fraying once you've made the cut, by painting the edges with colourless nail lacquer. Leave it to dry, of course, before you continue with your sewing.

* Save time, trying to get a professional "roll" on a collar. Take an ordinary wooden rolling pin, pad it with a slightly damp towel and set the roll on the collar with that, using a warm iron for the job. If you've still some stray tailors' tacks left in place, nip them out easily with a pair of tweezers—they're good too for getting out odd machine stitches.

* Now here's three for the wardrobe. If you find that trousers, sometimes skirts, get that knife-edge crease just where you don't want it, where they are draped over the bottom edge of the hanger, pad it first with a strip of foam plastic sheeting. You can simply pin it in place or tack it very roughly. And if you have dark clothes with fluff all over them, try tumble-drying them for a moment or two, it should take it off. If this doesn't work, then pop a damp sponge into the machine too. Finally, if you have a tubby hubby in tow, who keeps "popping" buttons off his shirts (and probably claims they're making them narrower than they used to) sew the buttons back on with thin spool elastic shirring thread so that they give to the strain.

* Save time when you're watching telly by doing boring chores: sift flour from the packet into a tin, put icing sugar through a sieve, odd jobs like that. If you have one of those salon home dryers, you can do the same kind of chores while you give yourself a shampoo set. Incidentally, if you're your own home hairdresser, make yourself a special apron to hold all your kit: pins, curlers, setting lotion and so on; it saves

having to gather them all up and take them to the dressing table or bathroom.

Money-savers

As we said, we all want to save our money for more interesting things, so here are a few pointers you may not know.

* Keep those wire-wool scouring pads under water, once you've started to use them, then they won't rust away—saves those awful marks on the draining board, too.

* Cash in on those irritating left-overs of soap, make a simple drawstring bag out of thin foam plastic, pop the bits of soap inside, and pull up the cord. You can use as a self-lathering sponge or mitt, and re-charge it as you want.

* Be mean about those bits of stale bread, even crusts. Use some of them for fondue, if your family likes that dish, or pop them into the oven next time it is cooling after a cooking session to dry them off, then store them in a paper bag, crushing them as you need them for breadcrumbs.

* Don't throw away the wrappers off packets of butter, margarine or lard. Keep them to use to grease pudding basins or dishes before you put food in to cook and use them too to grease patty tins before making cakes.

* Find that you always wear through the "working" fingers of rubber gloves? In my case it's the third and the index fingers that go first. Reinforce them with a piece of surgical tape, on the inside when the gloves are new, to stop your fingernails going through.

* Save money if you've got a gas stove by turning off that pilot light unless you are constantly lighting the burners. It uses up a surprisingly large amount of gas in a day—even turning it off overnight helps. Save time and money when you're boiling up water for tea. Measure accurately the amount of water you put in the kettle—you'll get your cup of tea faster and cheaper that way.

* Don't throw away the "lees" of wine, the bottom of the bottle which is often slightly sludgy. Put it into a bottle, add into it little by little, leave it somewhere sunny and warm (cover the top) and it will turn into vinegar. You can be chic

and have two bottles, one for white and one for red—put some herbs in them as well.

* Never dispose of the foil containers from take-aways or the foil dishes that pre-baked pies come in. They will clean up in the dishwasher, can be stacked in the cupboard and used for the freezer or for simple cooking in the oven.

* Got several left-hand household gloves? Don't throw them away, turn half of them inside out to get the right-hand pair. They feel a little strange but are perfectly good for "coarser" jobs like shovelling coal.

* Become mean about things in tubes, whether it's toothpaste or tomato paste. Get the last dregs out by "going over" the tube with a rolling pin.

* Be mean about wrapping paper too, not an inexpensive item these days and a nuisance to go out and buy. Unwrap presents carefully, inspect the paper for messages that will have to be covered when you re-cycle the paper (it's rather daunting to receive a present from a man wrapped in paper which says, "with love from Auntie May") then give it a press with a cool iron, under a dry cloth, fold and store for future use. Wrapping ribbon, provided it's not sticky, can be pressed and re-used too.

* If your husband is becoming trendy, and discarding his pyjamas, don't throw away the trousers. Single legs make marvellous covers for the average ironing board.

* Persuade him to keep his razor, complete with blade, in a wide-necked bottle of surgical spirit. It stops it from going rusty or deteriorating.

* An old nylon stocking—clean, of course—makes an excellent "bag" in which to store those large Spanish onions.

* No time to wash your hair? Run out of shampoo? You can use liquid detergent perfectly well for the job (that's what most shampoos are made from, anyway) or brush a little talc sparingly through your hair for a dry shampoo.

* Here's a cheap and very effective way to make your hands look good and soft; pour a little clean cooking oil into the palms, sprinkle on a little sugar and "wash" your hands in it, then rinse off with warm water.

IT'S PARTY TIME

"Let's give a party" is a phrase guaranteed to strike terror in the heart of the average cheat, not just because of the food that will have to be prepared, the drink brought in, but the realisation that the house will have to be straightened out from top to bottom too. I don't know why it is, but whenever I give a party (I've been trying to give them up for years) my guests

not only seem to wander in and out of all the bedrooms, but open up the cupboards as well, to see what's inside. (At one party I went to, two people disappeared into a cupboard together for two hours, it must have been a tidier one than mine.) Some parties, of course give themselves. If there's an occasion or perhaps a celebrity of some sort in train, the hostess can usually sit back and enjoy herself too. The best party I ever gave was one to which a friend brought three belly-dancers and five musicians—they went on strike for more pay, at the last minute, in my front hall!

Dinner parties are straightforward enough, and as long as you're not tempted to show off on the gastronomic front, they can be relaxing for you, too. Have one show-off dish by all means if you want to, but make life easier for yourself by cheating on the other courses. My favourite cheats are putting a little brandy into some shop-bought pâté, for instance, plus finely chopped herbs, re-shaping it into one of my baking dishes and serving it, as apparently mine. The same goes for good tinned lobster bisque. Sling in some sherry and some double cream and it tastes delicious, especially accompanied by "home-made" bread rolls which are in fact take-and-bake from the shop. Home-made croutons—it only takes a minute or two to fling a few tiny cubes of bread into garlic-flavoured oil—are another way to confuse the enemy into thinking the soup can't be tinned. The only packet soup I've found that doesn't give the game away is pea and ham. Stir in one or two frozen peas and some diced scraps of bacon and they'll think that's yours, too. On the sweet side, it's an easy matter to buy a huge ready-made sponge flan or discs of meringue and simply decorate them with fresh fruit and thick cream. You can't really cheat over the cheeseboard, but you can save money by buying a large tub of cream (not curd) cheese, dividing it into portions and adding garlic to one, chopped chives to another and paprika to the third for an interesting variety of flavours. For more ideas on cheating at cooking, take a look at Delia Smith's book on the subject (Coronet 60p).

If you have to do "duty" dinner parties, entertaining on behalf of your husband, or for yourself, inviting people who

are not your greatest friends but business acquaintances, for instance, cheat on all the work by having three dinner parties in a row with identical menus. (Let's hope your stomach can stand it!) I have a friend who is always having to entertain visiting firemen for her husband's company and she says the three-dinner party works wonderfully. You simply make up the meal beforehand in large batches, divided into three, and your preparation and cooking time on dinner parties two and three, is minimum—you can usually get away with the same table decorations too.

Most of us look forward to going out to dinner for two things to avoid having to cook, for once, and to *talk* to somebody. We do not go to see if they've dusted their house, or if their kitchen is tidy or to be treated to a great gastronomic experience, but sometimes the lines get crossed as far as the hostess is concerned. The most miserable meal of my life was with a family where the hostess had only too obviously been slaving over a hot stove all day and had equally obviously just had a row with her husband on that subject, just before we arrived. We had a roast meal (I think roasts are too much trouble) with at least six different vegetables each of which was thrust in front of us in a Martha-ish manner. At the other end of the scale is one of my favourite friends who says, quite frankly, that she hates cooking, and sends out for a Chinese take-away instead. Remember that men, and your husband's boss in particular, always seem to have a nursery hang-up, so cook simple food and plenty of it if you want them on your side. The kind of lady who serves up gulls' eggs and soufflés is trying to impress another lady, not a man—and who wants to impress a lady? Food like mother—or someone else's (foreign) mother—cooks always goes down best, and remember that the peasants knew what they were doing, and any ethnic version of the basic stew, whether it is goulash, curry or couscous, based on long slow cooking, helps the hostess. It will tick over happily for hours, improves on re-heating, and solves the problem of the guest who turns up late—so who needs to have a coronary over a soufflé dish? Save your soufflés for when you are eating *à deux*. Tinned baby potatoes are another

boon, especially if the timing of the meal is uncertain. They heat up in a minute and are delicious if you sprinkle finely chopped fresh mint over them. If you've got a home and a job to run, work out an important dinner party on a two-day basis. Prepare everything the night before and cook what you can, so that on *the* day you are merely finishing off and warming up. And if something goes awry with the sweet at the last minute, don't forget our old friend ice cream which comes in some really exotic flavours now—even a plain vanilla can be tarted up with a chocolate sauce laced with rum or brandy. Melt some bitter chocolate pieces in a pan over an asbestos mat or a double boiler, then whip in a quarter pint of evaporated milk and the booze. If you're really stuck you can use an equal weight of drinking chocolate or cocoa instead of slab chocolate.

Proper parties, the buffet kind, are becoming so expensive to run that it's time to have a re-think. Theme yours, for instance, around cheap food and make a feature of it. A pasta party, for instance, with a choice of, say, spaghetti, lasagne and canneloni with different sauces would be cheap and cheerful to run and you could get away with a roughish red wine to go with it. (A friend makes her own vin rouge with the aid of a kit from Boots, then blends it in with bought wine at roughly 50/50 proportions with surprisingly good results. She reckons it works out at something like 45p a bottle.)

A pub party would be fun to run—in fact, in America an English Pub Party is considered an IN thing. If there were enough people involved you could have a barrel of your favourite beer, otherwise you could go for large kegs or cans, and the food could be either East End style, with cockles and winkles, or the bread, cheese and pickled onion of a ploughman's lunch, or you could go for sausage rolls and hot pies and peas. Brunch is another cheap way of entertaining, the only snag with it that I've found is that people do tend to hang around all day. It could vary from a straightforward eggs–bacon–kidneys–kedgeree concoction to something more elaborate like eggs Florentine or iced borscht. Danish pastries are ideal for this meal, and there should be plenty of French

bread, and the usual alcoholic drink to go with it is Bloody Mary, served ice-cold. I prefer Buck's Fizz, a more or less half and half mix of orange juice and champagne. You can cheat on the champagne side with almost any dry sparkling wine, but the orange juice must be *fresh*, not even bottled or frozen. Lager goes down well at a brunch, too and takes on a slightly more up-market look if you serve it in long shapely glasses, with slices of lime slotted on to the rims of the glasses. Don't despise iced coffee, either or iced tea. Try making it with cold, not hot water in the first place: just put, say, four teaspoonfuls of tea-leaves into a jar, cover them with cold water and leave them to infuse overnight, with a lid on. Strain it, then add cracked ice. It has a beautiful golden colour to it.

Another money-saving idea that ought to be revived is the tea party which is certainly low on liquor (you could just serve sherry before they left) and cheap on supplies: paper-thin cucumber sandwiches and small fancy cakes cost nothing like as much as meat and vegetables. Another version could be a garden party.

"Ethnic" parties can be cheap too . . . you could serve Middle Eastern mezze, delicious items like hummus, white feta cheese, black olives and taramasalata, the famous fish pâté which you can buy, like hummus (a mix of pulverised chick peas, oil and garlic) from Greek or Turkish supply shops. Serve it with an appropriate wine—Retsina goes well with it, but a lot of people object to its turpentiny undertones—and end up with Turkish coffee or plain black coffee with a cardoman seed dropped in each cup. Smørrebrød is another item which the Scandinavians do so well but which is, let's face it, really only jumped up sandwiches. A little goes a long way with a Smørrebrød board. You can actually afford to buy minute quantities of smoked salmon and, by spreading them around artistically, make a surprisingly large number of sandwiches out of them. German sausages with sauerkraut and pumpernickel would make a cheap buffet meal, served with German beers. (You don't have to buy the genuine German-made sausage now, because Walls and Mattesons make it in England at a cheaper price.)

Give it a theme

Theming a party makes it more fun. I very much believe in barbecues, especially for teenagers, because all the mess is out in the garden, you can get away with paper plates and there's not much clearing up to do. But unless you have a maniac cook for a husband, who is longing to take over the catering (barbecues sometimes bring out the boy scout in them) pre-cook everything to almost-done point and then put it out on the barbecue to finish off. I've eaten more undercooked sausages and lamb chops out of doors than anywhere else. Don't think, incidentally, that you need expensive equipment to get a barbecue going. The best one I ever went to, on a mountainside in Spain was done by an Australian who simply screwed up some pages of *The Guardian*, lit them in an old biscuit tin and stood an oven-shelf over the top. The best kind of impromptu barbecue for the garden can be made with just a couple of dozen bricks. Size up a shelf from your oven, make a rectangle of brick that will support it, then build up a "wall" this way to a convenient height. If you are doing it on grass, you can fill in the bottom layer completely with bricks to stop any damage. Then light a fire inside, majoring on charcoal and place the oven grid on top. Don't forget to have lots of potatoes cooked in their jackets on hand, wrapped in silver foil; they help eke out the meat, and persuade people to "cook" the food themselves as much as possible. An alternative to the straight barbecue, as such, is a gypsy meal, with large iron cooking pots containing a variety of stews—pot au feu would be ideal—bubbling away on the barbecue grid, and let people help themselves. Another good do-it-yourself meal, indoors this time, is fondue—the cheese variety. Have plenty of back-up supplies of the sauce in the kitchen in other saucepans, ready to bring in, only cook small quantities at a time. Fondu is a wonderful way to use up the last stale bits of several months' loaves if you have a freezer so start storing the bits now, in a plastic bag.

Any excuse is an excuse for a party, but if you have a keen look in your diary, you'll find there are several weird and wonderful dates that could be celebrated. The quatorze

juillet, celebrating the storming of the Bastille is a good excuse for a French party (with accordion music on tape) the 4th of July fine for an American brunch. Then there's Halloween, of course, or All Saints' Day that follows it; but some more way-out items too—like the 3rd November, for instance, which is National Culture Day in Japan, according to my diary, or 19th May, which is Sports and Youth Day in Turkey! Fancy dress parties usually fall flat, but a tramps' party always goes down well and so do "come as you were when you got the invitation" ones.

Children's parties

The worst kind of children's party I can think of, is when they are at the age and stage when they are at the teenage stage when boys and girls sit and glower at each other across the room and won't mix. The only way to deal with this is to give one-sex rather than unisex parties at this time. One of the best parties that my children ever went to was one where the mother/hostess handed each child a Red Rover bus pass, a tramps' lunch done up in a spotted handkerchief and a bus map of London—then sent them out in pairs and gave a prize to the couple who had travelled farthest. If that's not cheating I don't know what is! Keep children's parties out of the house as much as possible. If you have a cellar you can turn it into a "discotheque", hopefully—and they start being disco conscious at the age of about eight now. Play lots of loud music and let them get on with it. The garage, if it won't take too long to clear, can be transformed overnight into anything from a space ship to a submarine with a little imagination, and it's easy to sweep up the débris the morning after.

Expect breakages and accidents if you have the party in the house; it's inevitable. Most children seem to turn up to parties in jeans now which is much more practical. Put a guard round the fire—borrow one if you haven't got one—dismantle the lock on the loo door or hide the key, otherwise someone is bound to lock themself in, and have a large mirror for girls to preen themselves in front of. Above all have a bottle of gin at the ready for you, and as a reward for any

grownups who turn up on time to collect their offspring. (Many unscrupulous parents have been known to use children's parties as a kind of open-ended baby-sitting session, and to go out on the town leaving Junior with his friend and, unfortunately, friend's parents who have to cope.) Children don't seem to notice decorations, in my opinion, but a wealth of crêpe paper and kitchen foil can be turned into giant flowers, animal shapes or simply paper chains at less expense than buying a paper party kit. It's cheaper and more fun too to hand the children crêpe paper, scissors, newspaper and so on, and let them make their own party hats (have plenty of Sellotape at the ready, and some pins). The one thing that they will expect, mark my words, is a present. In fact, most of the parties I've ever given for my children have been divided into two parts, the first half when the presents which had been brought by the guests were opened, examined and discussed, and the second half when the guests' presents from the hostess were compared, argued over and, generally, broken or eaten. To avoid jealousy I think it pays to have one bright idea and give each child exactly the same item, but if you have the stamina to sort things out, then there are one or two firms who actually specialise in cheap and cheerful party presents. One of these is Stoneleigh Mail Order Co. of 91 Prince Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, for instance, who have an amazing selection of novelties and toys for children from around 75p a dozen.

Get some help if your child-guests are at the exuberant age and stage. Bribe friends/relatives to be on hand (you could have a drinks party for them afterwards) because you need eyes at the back of your head to deal with fights, quarrels, spills and the inevitable accidents. (We assume your first-aid box is well filled.) To try to be hostess, mum, chef and nurse all in one is to ask for someone superhuman, and men too have a habit of finding some pressing engagement which keeps them out of the house at a time like this. Parties are the one time when au pairs seem to come into their own, and if you have one, with luck yours may rise to the occasion, even suggesting some new and foreign party games.

I've rarely succeeded in organising children into doing the

kind of games that we used to do; most boys' parties seem to end up as a running fight, for instance, but there are one or two old standards like Musical Chairs, and Squeak Piggy Squeak which still seem to appeal, though it's best to have someone playing the piano, if you can, or to have pop music on the radio that you can switch on and off rather than let someone loose on the hi-fi to stop and start the music. A new diamond stylus is an expensive item, and that's what you're going to need if you keep bouncing the pick-up. Blind Man's Buff and pinning the tail on the donkey will keep 'em quiet up to the age of around nine. And so will my favourite, railway carriages. You put two rows of chairs facing one another, so close together that when the children sit on them their knees are touching those of the people opposite. This is your "railway carriage", and to crowd it still more, have the chairs lined up at right angles against a wall. You need one newspaper per head, preferably something with lots of pages, and you then re-shuffle the papers so that each "passenger" has a daily paper with all the wrong pages inside. Now sit them down, with a few more standing crammed in the middle to give real commuter authenticity, and, at the word go, they all have to get their paper in order, retrieving missing pages from other passengers. The result is bedlam but a lot of fun.

Young teenage parties are the most difficult of all to organise and are, as I've said, best transformed into something that is not a party at all but some kind of an outing. A visit to the cinema or the theatre will sometimes solve this one if the group is small, but it could turn out to be expensive. If you have them home there's always the problem of keeping an eye on what exactly *is* going on as they polarise into couples. The demon drink tends to raise its head at this stage, and even if you have carefully and firmly made a fruit cup, there's probably a sub-plot somewhere to bring in some cider, it's also an occasion for furious and furtive smoking. It's a good idea to deflect their energies into running the party themselves. A barbecue is an obvious choice for this age group. If you're having the party indoors then it could be a Saturday night cook-out, with heaps of sausages and so on, on hand in the

kitchen for them to fry for themselves. The best way I ever coped with this situation was to hire a fortune-teller. Both boys and girls at this age may scoff at their stars in the newspaper, but can be seen, any day, furtively reading them. You don't even need to pay. If you've got a pal who fancies herself on the Tarot cards, or reads hands, she may be intrigued to come along and have a go. Fortune telling takes up a surprisingly long amount of time: queueing up for your turn, having the consultation, comparing notes with the others afterwards and, with luck, by the time it's all over there is something good on the telly. As a cheat, have no compunction about cashing in on the Film of the Week or the Saturday Night Movie, if it's a good one, as part of the general party scene.

Food is probably the least of our worries on the children's party front. Up to the age of about eight, it's jellies, chocolate biscuits, ice cream and so on, with lots of orange squash and fizzy lemonade. But be warned, children are becoming more and more sophisticated in their tastes, and in the area where I live, it's currently the In Thing to have a Chinese take-away for a feast at parties for nine-year-olds. You should certainly switch to savoury things when you get up to the age of eight. Crisps in all their multifarious flavours always go down well, so do salted peanuts, in fact, anything that the grownups might serve with drinks. Switch from sandwiches as such to sausages on sticks, French bread or patties—it saves all that endless sandwich-making, and you always have mountains of them left over, afterwards. Toffee apples, if you can get them, go down well too. Store your supply in waxed paper if you don't want a nightmare time trying to disentangle them.

There comes a time in everyone's life—especially a cheat's life—when things go wrong. Twice this week, for instance, I've been congratulating myself on how lucky/happy I am, when something has happened: the first time I fell flat on my face in the street and took a large chunk out of my knee, the second time my car, which I was driving into London, started to make a loud and menacing clanking noise under the bonnet. I needed a new engine. But every crisis has a solution—I've taken some everyday ones and suggested the answers.

The sink gets blocked, and a strong mix of boiling water and detergent won't clear it. Unearth your rubber plunger (hopefully you've got one) put the rim of the cup-shaped cap over

the outlet, hold a rag against the overflow grid, then pump the handle up and down fast, several times. If you haven't got a plunger but do have a rubber ball that happens to fit into the sink outlet, you can try using that—press down on it to squeeze it instead. Still no go? Unravel one of those wire coat-hangers that you get from the cleaners and try poking that down the outlet. If you happen to have plastic plumbing, then use something less violent: a plastic-covered curtain wire for instance, or a thin piece of bamboo cane or a plastic knitting needle. As a last-ditch stand, make up a very strong mix of kitchen salt and washing soda in equal proportions and spoon that down the hole, together with a teaspoonful of detergent for good measure, then a little boiling water. If these measures clear the sink, rinse it afterwards with cold running water. If they don't, call the plumber, or get your husband to undo the tap at the bottom of the U-bend underneath (have a bucket at the ready).

The cistern's overflowing, water is dripping down the side of the house from the outlet pipe. You have ballcock trouble—that thing, inside the cistern (lift the lid, take a look) which looks like a child's toy ball is there with the express purpose of shutting off the water when it reaches the right level and, for some reason or other it's not doing its job properly. Try bending the "arm" attached to it, so that it lies lower in the water. If it is already well down and waterlogged it has probably got a hole in it. You can buy another one easily at an ironmongers and screw it back on. Keep the lever arm closed meanwhile, by tying it to a piece of wood which you can rest across the top of the cistern (leave the lid off). If the loo won't flush, the opposite trouble to the cistern overflowing, check that the water is turned on, take the lid off the cistern and depress the ballcock into the water, half drown it, and the cistern will gradually fill up. When it reaches the right height (there will probably be a tide-mark in the cistern that tells you) you can flush the loo in the usual way. If the trouble persists it's probably a job for a plumber.

The loo is blocked? You need a special kind of plunger with a protective metal plate over the cap. (You should be able to get

one from the ironmonger.) Use it the same way as you would when dealing with a blocked sink. Push it up and down with as much energy as you can muster in the hope that it moves on the obstruction. Minor blockages can sometimes be moved on with the help of the ubiquitous coat-hanger unravelled once again to provide you with a piece of wire to poke round the bend.

Your tap drips? You have washer trouble. Find the main stopcock, turn the water off at the mains, then turn on your tap until it runs dry. Now take off the shield. It usually unscrews by hand, but if you can't make it budge, use a spanner for the job, but put a piece of rag between it and the tap so that it doesn't damage it. Underneath you will find a large hexagonal nut. Loosen this—use a spanner again if you have to—and you'll find you can take off the top half of the tap and there, underneath is the washer that is causing all the trouble, kept in place by a small nut. Unscrew the nut, take off the old washer take it to the ironmonger's with you, and get a new one of the same size. Then, replace the tap as it was before, with the new washer put in with the side stamped with the maker's name or mark facing the nut that keeps it in place. Make sure you screw the tap back together tightly, then turn on the main again.

A fuse has blown? Suddenly you don't have any electricity in one part of the house. You have overloaded a circuit somehow. It could be you've plugged in too many things, or it could be that something you've switched on is faulty. Turn off the electricity at the main. The switch is usually right alongside the fuse box. Check you've done so by trying one or two lights that were still working beforehand. Take the lid off the fuse box and pull out the white porcelain fuse holders that are inside until you find one where the wire is broken—there's usually a sooty burn-mark on it. Loosen the two screws that hold the wire in place at either end and take off the damaged wire. Replace it with a new piece, making sure it's the right thickness. There are four different ones: 5 amp, the thinnest for lighting, 15 amp, the next one up for things like an immersion heater. Then there's 30 amp which looks much thicker,

for those 13 amp sockets used for heating etc. and, occasionally 45 amp, very thick, which is used for cookers.

Just wind the new fuse wire around the screws—don't stretch it too tightly, there's no need—then tighten the screws again and replace the porcelain holder and switch on. If you've a brand new house you're lucky, you've probably got a fuse box with cartridge holders, like those you find in three-pin plugs, and all you have to do is to slot a new one in. After the fuse mending, try to find out what caused it, or it will simply go again. Often it's a three pin plug that is faulty in some way and needs re-wiring. Undo the big centre screw and take off the cover; you'll find inside a "bridge" over the flex where it enters the plug, held in place by two tiny brass screws. Undo one of them and swivel the cover to one side. Now have a look at the flex. The blue-covered wire, the neutral one, should be fixed to the left-hand terminal, the brown, live wire to the terminal on the right, the one that has a fuse over it, and the green/yellow striped one, if the flex has one (some are not earthed) goes to the top. Tug each one lightly to see if it is still fixed in place. Check the fuse—it could have blown (rob another appliance of one, temporarily to check).

If you are wiring a plug for the first time, cut back the main flex about two inches to expose the three separate wires inside, then strip them in turn back about half an inch to show the copper wires. Do this carefully or you'll cut right through by mistake. Use a knife or scissors to circle the plastic, then pull it off. Twist the copper strands into "tails", then fit the flex down into the plug and anchor it at the base by screwing the bridge down over it. Now fix the wires to the correct terminals either by poking them into the holes provided and screwing the top screw down on them or by winding the wire round the top of the terminal. Make sure you have the right fuse for your appliance: you need 3 amp for lamps, 13 amp for fires.

Your freezer goes off in a power cut? Leave it alone, don't open the lid. It should be able to exist like that for twenty-four hours without the food inside spoiling. (The more filled the freezer is, the better in a situation like this.) In the unlikely event that the freezer's off for more than a day, then there's only

one way out—cook the lot, if your cooker hasn't packed up too!

You've a fire in the kitchen? Don't pour water on it, if there is fat around—and many fires start in frying pans—it will only splatter and spread the fire further. Smother the blaze with a damp—but not wet—cloth. As a general rule, all fires should be smothered rather than have water flung on them. If you've a fire extinguisher, of course, that's a different matter.

Someone breaks a window-pane? If it's a small one you can probably cheat the odd-job man out of his fee by doing it yourself. Wear thick gloves, put down newspaper and smash out the old glass with a hammer, working from the top of the pane down, then pick out any bits round the edge that are left. Now take a chisel and lever or chip out all the old putty and the tiny nails that held the glass in place, ready to start again. Measure the height and the width of the opening, take an eighth of an inch off each measurement to make the glass easier to fit into place and get it cut to size. Take some putty, rolling it between your hands into a long sausage (it will become softer as it warms up). It should be no more than a quarter inch wide. Press it into the groove in the window frame, making sure the corners are covered well. Now push the new glass into place firmly, so that it squashes the putty. Hammer in the tiny nails (they're called glazing sprigs) at intervals to hold the glass, then cover the edge with another sausage of putty. Smooth it off diagonally with a knife (copy the putty on the other frames) and leave it to harden for ten days or so before you paint it.

THE CHEAT'S STAIN REMOVAL CHART

The worst everyday problem we have to tackle in the home is stains, so here, for quick reference is the Cheat's own stain removal guide, including instant first-aids for those inevitable accidents. (Remember what we said earlier on—if in doubt put it to soak in cold water—always test the treatment out on an unseen piece of fabric before you go ahead.)

Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits). If it goes on the carpet, mop up as much as you can first with a dry cloth, then use a warm solution of liquid detergent, carpet shampoo or upholstery shampoo with a teaspoonful of white vinegar added to each pint of water. Work up a lather (use a sponge for the job if you have one), dab it off, then treat it again. Continue until the carpet is clean—or until you are not getting any improvement. Then sponge with clean cool water, and brush the pile back up. Don't do large areas at a time and help dry the carpet afterwards by going over it with a vacuum cleaner or a *cool* hand

hair dryer. If the stain has not come out properly, try getting a professional in—or move a piece of furniture over the mark. Old stains on carpets can sometimes be taken out with surgical spirit or methylated spirit then with detergent—worth trying.

Alcohol on clothes? Wash in warm detergent if the garment is washable, then if you can still see the stain, have a go with surgical or methylated spirit. If it's dry-cleanable, sponge it with warm water and detergent and take to the cleaner as soon as possible if the stain has not come out. Alcohol on upholstery should be sponged with lukewarm water after mopping up (use kitchen towel for the job) and then, if the stain still shows, be tackled with an almost neat solution of detergent or patent cleaner. Use as little water as possible, then blot gently with a cloth dipped in clean water. Anything delicate like brocade or velvet should not be touched—get a cleaner in.

Alcohol rings on wooden tables (not French polished ones) can sometimes be taken out if you rub them hard with a pad moistened with metal polish. If this doesn't work then try steel wool dipped in wax.

The last resort: red wine can sometimes be removed from cotton (if it is colourfast) by saturating the area in twenty volumes hydrogen peroxide diluted in six parts of water then adding a few drops of ammonia. Leave the stain to soak for a few minutes then wash it out thoroughly. You can use ordinary household bleach to take wine stains off white cotton or linen, but rinse well.

Bird (droppings). If the budgie gets out and flies round the room or if you're dive-bombed by a pigeon (it happened to me once when I was wearing a brand new black velvet coat) the best treatment for this stain is salt. Sponge the mark with lukewarm salt water or, if it has dried on, soak it in a salt solution (about a teaspoonful to a pint). Blot it, then brush it with a strong solution of washing-up liquid and water, then rinse it and blot it dry.

Blood. Speed is essential here, try not to let it coagulate on cloth. Soak the stain in a strong salt solution in cold water, add some ammonia too if you have it at the rate of one tablespoonful to a pint. Leave the stain for a couple of hours, then it

should wash out in tepid detergent/water. A single obstinate spot of blood can often be taken out by rubbing it with a salt and water paste. If the stain is an old one and has dried on, use the same salt and ammonia solution but make the water tepid rather than cold. And if the fabric is white try a shock treatment with hydrogen peroxide but *not* if the fabric is silk, wool, or nylon: mix one cup of twenty volumes hydrogen peroxide with six cups of cold water and soak the stain overnight if the fabric is white or is colourfast, or for half an hour if you are unsure about it. Then rinse it well.

Blood on blankets is often difficult to take out. If you can leave the area to soak in cold salt water and then wash it you should be able to get it out. But if this doesn't work, try mixing some ordinary cornflour into a thick paste with cold water and spreading it over the stain. Let it dry, then brush it off, and continue the treatment until, hopefully, it has gone. Blood on a carpet should be sponged off with tepid water, then scrubbed with a detergent solution. If the stain is an old one, try soaking it with a mixture of one teaspoonful of ammonia to one pint of cold water.

Carbon Paper is often the working wife's nightmare as far as stains are concerned, but you can usually get it out if you rub the area with methylated spirit, then wash it out with warm water and detergent. The same method works for stains from *ballpoint pens*. Ordinary *ink* which so often gets spilled on carpets or furniture should be mopped up as fast as possible with anything to hand, blotting paper, ideally, but paper handkerchiefs or even newspaper will do. Then sponge with a hot soapy solution. Stain still there? If the carpet of fabric is wool or nylon, treat it with strong detergent or carpet shampoo. That evil-looking scarlet fluid that you use for correcting stencils can be taken out of any fabric but rayons of the silky Tricel type with nail-varnish remover. Make a pad of paper handkerchiefs and put it under the stain and drip the remover on to it, then, when the mark has disappeared, wash it out with detergent.

Chocolate, coffee, tea. Drinking chocolate or cocoa should rinse out of clothing if you soak it in cold water, then wash

in the usual way. If you drop some on an upholstered chair, or on something that needs dry-cleaning, blot it up as best you can, sponge the area with cold water, then with strong detergent, then finish up with some sort of proprietary cleaner like Dabitoff or with carbon tetrachloride. Always remember to sponge any milky drink off with cold water at some stage or other, it waters the milk down and makes it easier to get rid of. Hot chocolate spilled on a carpet should be blotted up, sponged with cold water, then tackled with detergent and finally with dry cleaner.

The same technique applies for *coffee*, instant or otherwise. If you spill coffee on your clothes, sponge it off as fast as possible, then take off the garment and tackle the spot this way. Stretch the area which contains the stain as tautly as you can, either by using an embroidery hoop if you have one, or by stretching it over a pudding basin (fasten it in place with a rubber band). Now pour boiling water over it continually, until the bowl is full, empty if necessary, and carry on. If the fabric is white, or the colour doesn't run, you can sprinkle a little Borax on the stain first, to help hurry it along. If it was black coffee that you spilled, you may need to follow up that treatment with a dose of twenty volumes hydrogen peroxide diluted in six parts of water, but only on white non-nylon fabrics.

Tea is easier to tackle. If you sponge your clothes in cold water, then wash them you should find no stain is left. Obstinate marks can be taken out by pouring boiling water, as for coffee, over the stain *after* you've sponged it with cold water. Old tea-stains sometimes respond to being soaked in cold water, then in a pint of water with one dessertspoonful of Borax added. Finally, for whites, try using hydrogen peroxide diluted in six parts of water. Tea on a carpet should come out if you clean it up with detergent and finish off with something like Dabitoff.

Bath stains are often tricky to tackle, but there is a very effective cream called Jenolite which you can find at Boots' stores which will take off things like lime crust—the sort of thing you get in a hard water area if you have a dripping tap. The same cream will cope with those greenish stains you

get around copper pipes, though simply rubbing them with a cloth soaked in vinegar may do the trick. Jenolite is very caustic so you must wear unsullied rubber gloves and rinse carefully afterwards—read the instructions very thoroughly before you start. Jenolite will also take off rust.

Fats are difficult to get out of fabric, especially if they were hot when they got there, and have penetrated the fibres. If it is on a garment that is washable, first scrape off all the fat you can with a knife held at right angles to the material, then blot up any you can with a kitchen towel. Now make a paste of washing powder (not soap, but a detergent like Tide) and Dabitoff, carbon tetrachloride or some similar cleaner and work it well into the stain—an old toothbrush is good for this. Leave it on for five minutes or so, then scrape the paste off, and wash the garment as soon as possible. On coats and suits I find a dry cleaner like Goddard spray-on Dry Clean works wonders. I've always sworn by that since the day I got black grease on a blonde fur coat—and it took it off in a flash. Car grease responds best to some kind of dry-cleaning treatment. On clothes, lighter fuel is very effective, or petrol, but be careful to do it out of doors as it is very very inflammable and hang the garment outside for an hour or so, if you are not able to wash it. Fats on a carpet should be "mopped up" by sprinkling the stain instantly with talcum powder, then run the vacuum cleaner over it to clean it off and finish off with the detergent and dry cleaner paste mentioned above.

Milk, cream and creamy sauces should all come out of clothing if you tackle them right away with tepid detergent suds. You can then follow up with a dry cleaner if necessary. On carpets you should do things the other way round: tackle the stain first with a dry cleaner, then with warm detergent, and the same goes for upholstery.

Gravy or soups are best cleaned off by soaking the stain in cold water, then washing it in detergent at a just off-cold temperature and finally following up with hot water. On a carpet, or on an upholstered chair, try using detergent first, finishing up with a dry cleaner.

Egg is another nasty item to clear up. On a carpet you should

blot up as much as you can, then sponge the stain with cold water. Anything that is left should disappear if you rub it with half a teaspoonful of ammonia dissolved in half a pint of water. On clothes, tackle the trouble by soaking the stain in cold salty water. Use about a teaspoonful of salt to a pint, then wash the garment in coolish detergent. If you can still see the stain then treat it with hydrogen peroxide (twenty volumes, one part to six parts water) adding just a little ammonia—a quarter teaspoonful to one pint of liquid. The peroxide treatment cannot be used on wool. Use the salt water then detergent treatment on upholstery too and, if necessary, follow up with dry cleaner.

Fruit in all its forms—berries, juices and so on can leave stains, particularly if it is in the blackcurrant/red currant/blackberry class. Soak the stain first in cold water in the hope that the colour will "float out". Try a little salt on it if it doesn't show signs of shifting. Then, if the garment is made of wool, rub a little glycerine into the stain and leave it for some hours—moisten it again with some clear (white) vinegar, leave it for a moment or two and then sponge it clean with warm water. If it is white cotton you can stretch the area over a pudding basin and pour boiling water on it—that usually washes it through, and then try the six parts water, one part twenty volumes hydrogen peroxide method—do this with the material still stretched over a bowl. The sun will very often bleach the last vestiges of fruit stains from things but if you're left with a blackish ring, try using Dygon on white cotton. Clean fruit stains off upholstery and carpets with lukewarm detergent, then with methylated spirit diluted half and half in water.

Fruit drinks—squashes and so on, can leave bad stains. If you are lucky they'll come out if you wash them in cold detergent. Use a nail brush to scrub it in, then you can follow up by dabbing surgical spirit or methylated spirit on the mark, and/or trying hydrogen peroxide in the way I've described before. The methylated spirit method usually works well on delicate materials. Orange juice should come off with a tepid wash, the same goes for rosehip syrup—two things that are

likely to be spilled by accident-prone toddlers. That other baby-potion, cod-liver oil must *always* be tackled right away if it spills on clothes. Old stale cod-liver oil not only smells rancid and unpleasant but is impossible to remove. Treat cod-liver oil stains with a dry cleaner, then wash the garment, and finally try the hydrogen peroxide trick unless it is made from wool.

Ketchup is another monster to deal with, and with it I'd include anything canned or bottled made from tomato—baked beans sauce, for instance, or tomato soup. Dab the spot at once with plenty of cold water, then give it a good going over with hot water and detergent. Then, if the fabric is colourfast and not silk or wool, you can try using hydrogen peroxide solution. Tomato stains on upholstery should be moistened in cold water, then have glycerine rubbed into them. Leave the mark for several hours to soak, then sponge it clean with hot water and detergent and rinse it. On carpets, clean it off with a mixture of water-softening powder and water—bath salts act in very much the same way.

Iron-mould is a nightmarish thing to find on fabrics, but Dygon will often take it off whites very effectively; just follow the instructions on the tin. A tougher treatment, again for whites, is to use oxalic acid, provided the garment is not silk or wool—dissolve a quarter ounce of crystals in a pint of cold water (always use a glass or china bowl for this, not metal) and soak the stain in it for about ten minutes—no longer—then rinse. Add a little ammonia to the rinsing water, and *remember* oxalic acid is very poisonous indeed.

Make-up should come off clothes easily enough if you use a dry cleaner like carbon tetrachloride, then sponge the stain down with detergent and lukewarm water. Lipstick needs a slightly different tack. Rub some Vaseline into the stain with your fingers, working it well in, then wash the grease and, hopefully the stain too, in hot detergent—if the garment is made from nylon, use methylated spirit to get out lipstick, then wash it. If the garment is dry clean only, then soak with dry-cleaning liquid, then again with methylated spirit and sponge it afterwards with warm water and detergent, and, finally

plain water to rinse. Lipstick on a carpet should be tackled with dry cleaner, then with methylated spirit and finally detergent. On upholstery use Vaseline first, as for other fabrics, then a dry cleaner, finally methylated spirits and warm detergent. Suntan oil is another nuisance. (The strange sweet smell of some brands never leaves your clothes.) Tackle oil stains on beachwear with a dry cleaner then detergent. If you have it on your swimsuit, clean it off with a dry cleaner as fast as possible, then wash the suit.

Perspiration not only leaves unsightly marks, but smells as well. If it is on a white fabric, wash the garment with water softener, or put ordinary soda crystals in the water, and bleach it afterwards with a solution of hydrogen peroxide. If the fabric is coloured, and if there is a pale patch to deal with, damp it with water, then sponge it with ammonia and water. Another method that sometimes works, believe it or not, is to crush an Aspirin or Disprin into the stain with the back of a spoon, when the fabric is damp, leave it on for about an hour, then wash. Sponging the stain with vinegar (the white variety) sometimes works too, and, on white garments, Dye-white will sometimes restore them. Having rid the garment of the stain, here's the best way to get rid of the smell: soak the garment in a bowl of warm water with two large handfuls of cooking salt in it, leave it for about an hour, longer if you like, then rinse it thoroughly and hang it out of doors for as long as possible.

Animals, needless to say, cause headaches unless you have succeeded in house-training them from the word go. (One expert tells me that the best way to tackle a puppy is to get it used to using a thick pad of newspaper as a loo, then move the newspaper each day nearer the door and, finally, outside so it gets the message.) Puddles and messes should be blotted or scooped up as fast as possible, then doused with plain slightly tepid water. The stain should then be tackled with a warm solution of liquid detergent with a teaspoonful of hydrogen peroxide to the pint stirred in. Rinse this off, then douse the stain with the same mixture and let it dry *in situ*—this will get rid of the smell, as well. Babies' accidents can be treated with just-warm water with a little salt added, then sponged in warm

water with a little ammonia included. Another hazard from both children and animals—sick, should be mopped up, soaked in just-warm water, then tackled with liquid detergent and rinsed. Follow this up with another detergent solution, this time with a dessertspoonful of hydrogen peroxide to the pint added.

Scorch marks. If they are really bad, are almost untreatable, but mild ones on clothes that can be washed will respond to being bleached out with hydrogen peroxide (twenty volumes, in six parts water) with a tiny amount of ammonia added—a quarter teaspoonful to a pint of the solution. This can't be used on wool, but works well on cotton. You can try a teaspoonful of powdered borax in a pint of warm water. It may just lift a scorch stain from wool, it certainly won't do it any harm. Scorch marks on table-tops—those white rings—are best got out with a rag dipped in metal polish, or a proprietary thing like Duraglit. Rub hard round the circle, then polish the table with ordinary furniture polish. Another dodge that works is to use steel wool dipped in wax polish. French-polished furniture is far more tricky to tackle and best left to an expert, but you can have a go with a rag sparingly moistened with a solution of vinegar and water 1–8.

Tar is becoming more and more a natural beach hazard. If you're away on holiday and get it on your skin you can usually get it off right away with a rag dipped in perfume—expensive but effective; otherwise use eucalyptus oil. Lighter fuel works well too. It pays to buy a proprietary tar remover for occasions like this; there are several now on sale.

Sweets and ice cream are another item on the holiday scene that can cause havoc with clothes. *Chewing gum*, as I said earlier in the book, is best tackled by putting the garment into a freezer or rubbing the stain with an ice-cube then chipping it off. Otherwise get as much as you can off the garment with your fingers or with a knife and you'll find that if you rub egg-white into the rest it will make it soft and fairly easy to wash out. Chocolate is another nuisance, but having scraped what you can off your clothes, it should be possible to get it out with an ordinary wash. If there is any mark left afterwards, try

using the hydrogen peroxide method I've described earlier on, on whites. *Ice cream* should wash out easily, but if it has dried on, then give a dry-clean treatment first. *Ice lollies* sometimes have brightly coloured fruit juice in them. Soak the garment affected as soon as you can, first in cold water, then warm. Wash it, and if there is still a stain *in situ*, stretch the area over a pudding basin and pour boiling water on it, and finally try the hydrogen peroxide trick.

Wax is an annoying item to deal with, often the aftermath of one of those candle-lit dinner parties. If you've got it on your clothes, on napkins or on the tablecloth, get as much as you can off first of all with a knife (scrape the blade at right angles to the fabric to avoid cutting it) then sandwich the fabric between two towels and press it with a hot iron. Move the fabric inside the "sandwich" each time you press so there is a clean layer alongside the stain. Alternatively use blotting paper instead of towelling, it's cleaner and easier, but I'm assuming this is an emergency situation and you haven't any blotting paper in stock. Coloured candles may leave a mark behind even after this treatment, but you should be able to get it out with methylated spirit. Dilute it half and half in water for rayons or nylon. Wax on a wooden table-top should be scraped off carefully, then the rest rubbed off with hot water or with a dry cleaner.

Plasticine often gets trodden underfoot into carpets. The best way to tackle it is to pick or scrape off every bit you can, then rub the plasticine with either petrol or carbon tetrachloride, but remember about inflammable fumes, so leave the doors and windows open while you do so. You may need to follow up with a hot detergent solution too.

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